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### Wisdom of the Oppressed: Stirring the Voices of Successful African-American Men

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WISDOM OF THE OPPRESSED: STIRRING THE VOICES OF SUCCESSFUL  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Lois Merriweather Moore

San Francisco, California

May 2002

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Lois Murreweather Moore May 7, 2002  
Candidate Date

Dissertation Committee

Patricia A. Mitchell May 7, 2002  
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Dorothy J. Messersmith May 7, 2002

Denis E. Collins, Jr. May 7, 2002

## DEDICATION

To my ancestors who I never knew, that have transitioned on, to my ancestors who I knew, that have transitioned on, to my God-fearing mother and father upon whose shoulders I rise with gratitude, joy, and determination, I dedicate Wisdom of the Oppressed.

To my loving husband Terry Clark who made unbelievable sacrifices every day, to my thoughtful daughters Katrina and Crystal who helped in a myriad of ways, I dedicate Wisdom of the Oppressed.

To an awesome God who kept me in the palm of his mighty hand, built a hedge of protection around me, sustained me in difficult times, and gave me the courage to walk by faith on an unfamiliar path, I dedicate Wisdom of the Oppressed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So much love, understanding, patience and encouragement has gone into Wisdom of the Oppressed. It has come from my husband Terry, my favorite first-born Katrina Denise, my favorite second-born Crystal Renee, my grandson Devon (who I endearingly call The Terrorist) my mother-in-law Doll, my sister Fran, my brothers, friends, colleagues, and professors. I thank you all. For giving me the time and space I needed to finish a mighty task, I thank you. For understanding when I did not have time to call, acknowledge contacts, or send Valentine cards, I thank you. For continuing to give me love and support through all the stages of the dissertation and my seclusion from our friendship circles, I thank you. For continuing to encourage me at every stage of the process, I thank you. For putting your arms around me and always lifting me higher, I thank you and I love you. Edna, Fred, Emily, Rosie, Monique, Donna, Natasha, Rudy, Evette, Jean, Charlene, Rose, Debra, Reggie, I acknowledge with thanksgiving your presence and permanence in my life.

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## CHAPTER I

### The Research Problem

African American men have always been placed in a very precarious and dangerous position in America. From the racist dehumanization of slavery to current policies and practices based on a cornerstone of racism, which perpetuate lack of opportunity and victimization, black men have especially been marked for death, both physically and psychologically.

(Carroll, 1998, p. 19)

### Statement of the Problem

The positive voices of successful African-American men have been stifled and silenced in American society. Whether in print media, wire media, in the business world of corporate America, the Board Rooms, Academia, or in blue collar America, our society does not hear the voices of successful African-American men. These successful men are present but not acknowledged. Franklin (1999) speaks of this phenomenon as the invisibility syndrome in that, "Invisibility is considered a psychological experience wherein the person feels that his or her personal identity

and ability are undermined by racism in a myriad of interpersonal circumstances" (p. 761).

The persistent individual, institutional and cultural racism at all levels of American society is hiding the voices of successful African American men, rendering these men invisible (Jones, 1997). How do these successful African-American men feel about being invisible? What does it do to their psyche to be ignored, devalued, demeaned, and dehumanized daily? Kunjufu (1985, 1986) posits that the constant bombardment of being identified as unacceptable, of little worth and invisible, damages the self-esteem of the African-American man. This stance makes the research on successful African-American men even more necessary and crucial because with this type of research, policies, programs and support systems can be implemented to ensure the success of even larger numbers of African-American men. Why are success statistics as well as other positive research for African-American men so noticeably missing from the databases and journals of scientific inquiry? Is the act of ignoring these men another way of American society saying no matter what you achieve, you are still not good enough, you lack value and worth, your voice will not be heard or valued, you will always be the face at the bottom of the well (Bell, 1992)?

In spite of the insult of White America ignoring successful African-American male voices, and in some cases denying their existence, African American men have continued to succeed and to achieve. Hrabowski (1998, p. 192) states "...we can find excellent examples of young, successful African-American males from all types of socioeconomic backgrounds." What is the force that drives these men, what is the strength that sustains them? What difficulties have they faced and what demons have they conquered in order to maintain their success? What is the well of courage they draw from each day that nourishes their desire to continue? Carroll (1998) says of success,

In a capitalistic society "success" is often a result of economics, based on the accumulation of wealth. African Americans, through miseducation, lack of skills and job opportunities, and individual as well as institutional racism, are too frequently blocked in accessing "acceptable" routes of empowerment through economic gain. (p. 19)

Charting their journey to survival and success, the researcher dialogued with five, successful African-American men, documenting their stories from their own words. The researcher listened to their stories, which were shared from their worldview, and in this research study, has

chronicled their words of wisdom and success. In addition to adding to the body of positive research knowledge on African-American men, the researcher hopes that this participatory research study will also serve as a guide, a tool, and a map for African-American males in the future.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to listen to the voices of successful African-American men as they talked about the life situations, people, events and communities of support that had created their success and sustained them. The aim of the researcher, in dialoguing with this population, was 1.) to add to the body of research that identifies resiliency factors in successful African-American men. 2.) to add to a body of research that identifies common experiences for successful African-American men. 3.) to identify those factors which help successful African-American men sustain a sense of dignity, balance, and humanity when dealing with what Carroll (1988) refers to as the M.E.E.S. factor (mundane, extreme, environmental stress).

In this study, five successful African-American men were engaged in dialogue to explore their reflections on those factors that had contributed to their present

success. Through a process of dialogic retrospection, they were asked to reflect on people who had influenced their lives. They were asked to reflect on events that had impacted their lives and prejudices they had encountered. They were also asked for their definition of success. The researcher tape-recorded and analyzed the reflections for generative themes in order to provide answers to the research questions.

#### Background and Need for the Study

From the era of Reconstruction to the present, the voices of successful African-American men have been stifled in our society. On an individual, institutional and cultural level, African-American men have been made to feel invisible by a society replete with racism. Franklin (1999) states, "The invisibility syndrome, as a clinical paradigm, therefore assesses for African American men...immersed in a racialized environment how recognition, satisfaction...interact in an intrapsychic manner to determine their visibility or invisibility" (p. 765). Wright (1940) touched upon the African-American man as invisible and voiceless in a race driven society with his character study of Bigger Thomas in the novel *Native Son*. There has in fact been an attempt to not only stifle the

voices of successful African-American men and make them invisible, but also to assassinate their image. Hutchinson (1996) relates the story of how National Public Radio (NPR) did not know how to handle a success story of an African-American man. He writes,

They simply didn't have a clue how to handle a story spotlighting the success of black men. NPR, along with much of the media, had built an impregnable tomb and locked itself in. If the story is not crime, drugs, gangs, or poverty they're lost. (p.171)

Although there are successful African-American men in every facet of American society, we do not hear their voices, and rarely see them in the media. Print journalism and television media do not let the voices of these men touch America. Page (1997) observes,

In addition to our need for a new generation of ethnographic studies on black community life in all the Americas, we must also methodically observe the media's strategic deployment of black male imagery (and all mass-produced nonwhite imagery). We must be theoretically equipped to show how it encourages the viewing public to believe that only a few exceptionally embraceable African American men are capable of succeeding, while the rest should be

contained (literally and figuratively) because they are innately incapable and tend to fail even when offered a chance. (p. 99)

Whether there is a conversation around finances, politics, global warming, great literary works or other topics of interest to Americans, the voices of successful African American men in these areas are rarely if ever sought or heard. This seemingly innocuous oversight is deceitful to African-American men, an ongoing insult, and an added social stress factor because it leaves the impression that there are no successful African-American men whose voices are worthy or valid enough to be heard. This pervasive, seemingly innocuous oversight of print journalism and television media exacerbates the cultural stress factor for African-American males. On the other hand, those African-American men whom the media oftentimes want to portray as positive images, are seen as negative by other African-Americans (Page, 1997). Print journalism and television are more examples of the mundane extreme environmental stress (M.E.E.S factor) that Carroll addresses. Studies have shown that the numerous societal stressors experienced by African-American men can be linked to poor health and abbreviated life spans (Kirk, 1986; Parham & McDavis, 1987). It is to be noted that not

withstanding this insulting oversight by the media and the individual, institutional, and cultural racism in American society, African-American men have survived and continue to be successful (Banks, 1996; Plummer, 1996; Franklin & Mizell, 1995; Elligan & Utsey, 1999).

What are the stepping-stones to success for African-American men? How has the successful African-American man become who he is today? This study identified five African-American men who had been recognized and honored as successful by the African-American Community Entrustment and the Bay Area United Way. In a dialogue with the researcher, these men shared their successes and talked about their triumphs in spite of the social injustices, prejudice, and racism they had experienced. They participated in a retrospective dialogue on the "in spite of's" in their life: in spite of racism, in spite of discrimination, in spite of segregation, in spite of Jim Crow, in spite of Black Codes, and in spite of slavery. This study recorded successful Black male voices telling their stories of survival. Based on each participant's experience, he has added to the body of research such information as how do successful African-American men define success in the context of the larger society, what are the sources of validation for the successful African-



American man, and what is the most prudent manner to triumph over negative situations. These voices of successful African-American men now serve as a future model for young African-American men who feel they have no voices that are validated outside of their immediate community. (Edwards, A., & Polite, C. K., 1992).

There seems to be a conspiracy in America to hide the truth --- the truth that most African-American men are gainfully employed, law-abiding citizens taking care of their homes and families. Young Black men are losing their lives to depression, violence, suicide and destructive behavior as they fall victim to the lie that they are worthless (West, C. & hooks, b., 1991). The rate of suicide among African-Americans, and African-American men specifically, has increased since Prudhomme did his study in 1938. "Currently, the highest rates of suicide for African American men are among those in the 20 to 34 year old age group" (Joe, S. & Kaplan, M. S. 2001, p. 107).

The images young African-American men see every day do not portray them in a positive light; nor do those images portray them in the light of truth. The dominant media portrayal of African-American men would have one believe that African-American men's lives are prone to violence and limited to sports, music, and the legal system (Lawrence,

1981). This is a dangerous and debilitating stereotype because there is no balance that tells the truth, that the vast majority of African American men are nonviolent, contributing members of society (Fraser, 1994).

This participatory research study grew out of a need to hear from African-American men, to use their voices to tell their stories of success, from their worldview--- to read their own world (Freire, 1993). The study, based on the successful lives of African-American men (who have experienced what future generations are striving for) serves as a paradigm, a model that stirs the voices of successful African-American men, to tell their stories from their worldview. In so doing, the study charts a road to success, based on empirical evidence.

#### Theoretical Framework

There can be no adequate study of African-American men without the study and consideration of their African roots and ancestry. Civilization began in Africa, with Africans, with dark skins. Bennett (1993) observes,

Back there, in the beginning, blackness did not seem to be an occasion for obloquy. In fact, the reverse seems to have been true, for whites were

sometimes ridiculed for "the unnatural whiteness of their skin."

Ancient Kemet civilization, the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade, Slavery, Emancipation, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, Segregation, Black Codes, Desegregation, Integration, and Backlash all serve as a backdrop and framework for the study of successful African-American men. The African-American man has an exhausting history of social and psychological upheaval (Franklin, 1992). Possibly the foundation and cornerstone of the African-American man's inner strength rises out of his ancient African Kemet roots with its teaching of the ten virtues, the seventh of which is "Freedom from resentment under persecution and wrong" (Hilliard, 1995).

In addition to the historical perspective of the African-American male, the study also considers him within a framework of philosophical, sociological, and psychological factors. African-American men are only four generations removed from being considered, by law, 3/5's of a man. When we consider today that it is not uncommon to find three generations living in the same household, four generations removed from being considered 3/5's of a man could have a very powerful psychological impact when it comes to day to day living. The institution of slavery

undermined the African-American man's sense of control over his own life. He was seen as no more than chattel, to be bought, sold, branded, castrated and discarded at the whim of his owner (Mannix & Cowley, 1962). What is the psychological residue that surrounds the everyday life of the successful African-American male? In his success, how does he deal with, and heal from, personal racist hurts?

Is the community the African-American man lives in a place of comfort and support or is it a hindrance? Typically, education and community have been a support to African-American Males. As the researcher looked at Northern cities in the early 1900's, there were community run YMCA's, Literary Societies, Black Fraternities and Sororities, Historical Societies and church organizations serving as sources of support, encouragement, and refuge (Franklin, Vincent & Anderson, 1978). Today, as a result of African-Americans branching away from large urban areas, many of these types of community support groups are not in place. Consequently, there is a feeling of suspension and social isolation experienced by many successful African-Americans. What new societal factors are filling the gap to nurture the success of African-American males? Bell hooks makes a very poignant statement in speaking to the author Cornel West, when she says "often we cannot look to

traditional places for recognition of our value; we bear the responsibility for seeking out and even creating different locations" (hooks, 1995).

As the researcher listened to the stories of successful African-American men in a framework of ancestral, historical, psychological and social considerations, each participant recounted in his own words those times when his value as a human being was recognized and acknowledged. Each man talked about the importance of knowing and having an appreciation for his African ancestry. Each man shared the psychological stress of being constantly vigilant to the protracted mundane racism. And for each, family and close friends were a strong factor. For each of the participants, the fond memories of having someone recognize their value and contribution, have sustained them through the years.

#### Research Questions

There were four foundation questions that guided this study. There were also other questions contained in the dialogue session with each of the participants. The four foundation questions were the following:

1. To what extents are the voices of successful African-American men stifled?

2. How does a successful African-American man sustain his manhood in a racist society?
3. What societal stabilizers serve as buffers to the African-American male's emotional psyche?
4. What are the sources of validation (of self-worth) for the African-American male?

### Limitations

There were several limitations to the study. The five participants in the study may not have been representative of all successful African-American men. All of the participants were from the San Francisco Bay area, which may not be a true representation of successful African-American men throughout the United States.

The number of participants being interviewed limited the validity of this study. Although valid information can be gained by analyzing the responses of five men, and each participant gave in-depth insight into his experiences, the researcher realizes that these five men are but a sampling of a much larger population. The researcher is not certain what impact if any being a female interviewing males, created in the data results. There were times during the interviews when the researcher felt that had she been male,

and older, participants would have contributed more information.

Dialoguing with a population of five successful African-American men may not give a true indication of factors that can be applied to the total population of successful African-American men. The study is limited also in its implications because a third party, with no connections to the study, identified the participants as successful. Neither the researcher nor the participants identified the participants as successful. During the initial contact, some of the participants were at first reluctant to be identified as successful.

#### Significance of the Study

While the dysfunctional experiences and deficit theories of African-American men are often investigated and found in the scholarly literature, the scholarly literature on success factors for African-American men goes virtually ignored. That fact makes this study extremely relevant because it adds to that body of limited research on functional, successful, African-American men. This study listened to the voices of successful African-American men and records their stories of success as they reflected and identified in their own words those people, actions,

events, and situations that contributed to their success. The study investigated the structure of community support and societal stabilizers used by successful African-American men. The study identified generative themes related to success and analyzed their implications for social policy. If the American educational system is going to be successful in laying a foundation to future success for African-American males, it needs to know what to include in that framework. By listening to the voices of successful African-American men address the four major research questions, the researcher analyzed and identified tools of resistance and coping skills with which young African-American boys can achieve success in adulthood. Findings from this study provided information on African-American men's concept of success, thus providing a perspective from the worldview of a minority group, outside of the mainstream. The research offered new ways of approaching young African-American men in terms of aiming toward future success. Participants were very clear that it was family, friendships, community connectedness, a sense of knowing self and knowing African history that gave them a true sense of success.



### Implications and Applications

This study will be significant and useful to African-American children, policy makers, parents, adoption agencies, foster care programs, health care systems, juvenile justice systems and school systems. Any person, group or agency that comes into contact with African-American males would find this study useful and informative.

Adoption and Foster Care agencies could use the study to help in the screening of appropriate families for child placement. Health care systems could use the study for holistic medicine in treating the total patient. The juvenile justice systems could use findings from the study to improve recidivism. The school system could use the findings of the study to enhance and improve services and programs for African-American male populations.

Print journalism and television media, as a basis to portray African-American men in a more realistic role, could use the study. Print journalism and television media is strongly positioned to persuade and convince society. Just as the media has done a negative disservice to the image of African-American men, the findings in this study can be the watershed for reversing many of those negative images that have persisted over the years.

### Definition of Manhood

1. The state of being an adult male human being. (Funk & Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary, 1966)
2. The state of being human. (Funk & Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary, 1966)
3. The composite qualities such as courage, determination, and vigor, ordinarily attributed to an adult male. (American Heritage Dictionary, 1982)
4. The state or condition of being part of or endowed with humanity. (American Heritage Dictionary, 1982.)

### Summary

As the research problem shows, the dominant media portrayal of African-American men would have one believe that African-American men's lives are prone to violence and limited to sports, music and the legal system. But the review of the literature will show otherwise.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Related Literature

#### Overview

A review of the literature on the voices of successful African-American men was conducted looking at impacts in terms of ancestral, historical, sociological and psychological factors.

The review provides systematic and critical examination and evaluation of previous research related to success factors and resiliency in African-American men. There are four main sections in the review of related literature: 1) an ancestral review of the successful African-American man's African roots, 2) the historical background of the impact of the American slave trade and the Black Codes of the Reconstruction Era, 3) the sociological impact of the legacy of slavery on successful African-American men, and 4) the psychology of African-American success in a framework of mundane extreme environmental stress (M.E.E.S.) (Carroll, 1998).

When considering why the voices of successful African-American men go unheard, it was necessary to reflect on the issue within the framework of at least four perspectives: ancestral, historical, sociological, and psychological. These particular perspectives were important because they

served as a backdrop for an understanding of the cultural variables present in a study of the African man and the African-American man in a Euro-American dominated culture.

A. M. Harris and R. Majors (1993) state,

The failure to consider cultural variables denies the historical and sociocultural meaning of being African-American in a Euro-American dominated society. Many of the attitudes, opinions, and beliefs of African-Americans have been shaped by racism, prejudice, and discrimination. These sociopolitical experiences, combined with historical traditions that date back to Africa, differentiate African-Americans from other racial and ethnic groups. An awareness of the cultural values that distinguish African-Americans as a racial group is essential to those who hope to develop and implement interventions to assist African-Americans. (p. 227)

Within the framework of these four perspectives, the researcher posed four main research questions. 1) To what extents are the voices of successful African-American men stifled? 2) How does an African-American man sustain his manhood in a racist society? 3) What societal stabilizers serve as buffers to the African-American male's emotional

psyche? 4) What are the sources of validation (of self-worth) for the African-American male?

### Ancestral Background of the African-American Man: Roots in Africa

The first part of the review discusses the successful African-American man's background from his ancestral roots in his motherland of Africa. It includes three parts: (a) self-perception, how the African man saw himself in his own country, (b) life in Africa before European colonization, and (c) European penetration of Africa and the trans Atlantic slave trade.

#### *Self-perception in Africa: How the African Man Saw Himself in His Country of Birth*

When looking at the source of the African-American man we are also looking at the source of all civilization, which is Africa (Bennett, 1993; Leakey, 1961; Sertima, 1976). Before the African-American man was African-American, he was African. Although the body of archeological data supports Africa as the origin of mankind, the documented study of Africa's history and its people are like an iceberg, with only the tip having been painstakingly researched by scholars (Hillard, 1995). Yet, enough of Africa's history is known and documented that it

makes it very clear that when African men were taken from their homeland, they were taken from well developed and thriving civilizations that manifested cultural development, political systems of order, social infrastructures, evidence of spirituality, and a sophisticated process of passing on knowledge (Bennett, 1993; Budge, 1928). The research further shows that free African men sailed as experienced navigators, guides, and interpreters with the Spanish and Portuguese across the Atlantic to the Americas long before the pilgrims arrived. This evidence indicates that African men were in the Americas as free men before they were here as slaves. Based on the documented historical record and research of Africa, the African man had a strong sense of self, self-worth, and manhood before he was brought to the Americas. In his own country of Africa, the African man had a voice and knew success. Bennettt, (1993) comments,

Blacks, or people who would be considered blacks today, were among the first people to use tools, paint pictures, plant seeds and worship gods.

In the beginning, then, and for a long time afterwards, black people marched in the front ranks of the emerging human procession. They founded empires and states. They extended the boundaries of the

possible. They made some of the critical discoveries and contributions that led to the modern world. ...

During this critical period in the evolution of man, blacks were known and honored throughout the ancient world.

The fact that African men in their own country had built empires and were known and honored throughout the ancient world speaks very clearly to them being more than meager chattel when they were brought shackled and chained to labor as beasts in the fields to fuel the economy of a newly forming America. The Africans who arrived at the slave ports of call in the Americas, did not rise from the bowels of stench filled ships, they rose from a 600,000-year tradition of culture and civilization (Bennett, 1993; Budge, 1928; Hillard, 1995).

#### *Life in Africa Before European Colonization*

Before European colonization, life in Africa revolved around agriculture, manufacturing, local commerce, and international trade. It is important to note that Europeans did not bring civilization to Africa. Africa was a thriving civilization with a historic culture long before Europeans arrived (Hillard, 1995). Political stability in various regions was maintained through kings, Pharaohs, provincial governors, viceroys and large armies. A

stimulating intellectual life thrived with Timbuktu being the center for culture and intellectual learning in the world during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Bennett (1993) notes,

The University of Sankore and other intellectual centers in Timbuktu had large and valuable collections of manuscripts in several languages, and scholars came from faraway places to check their Greek and Latin manuscripts. The seeds scattered here put down deep roots. (p. 19)

The family as an institution proliferated throughout pre-colonial Africa. The majority of the ancestors of American slaves came from the West Coast of Africa. At the foundation of the West African society was the family, which was organized in tribes. Because of tribal customs, the concept of the extended family was widespread in ancient African civilization. Polygamy was common among those of the upper moneyed class but for the poor, and those with fewer assets, monogamy was most often practiced (Budge, 1928).

Within each tribe, those most vulnerable in the society, the old and the infirmed, were well cared for by the village. The concept of community was at the core of everyday life, even to the extent of the land. The notion



of land ownership was alien to the African man. West African belief was that the community had rights and ownership over the land, not individuals. A man was free to move his family wherever he wanted to settle and live without worrying about "buying land." This was important because agriculture was at the core of much of the economic life of rural Africa.

So the African man, who was brought to the Americas as a slave, came from a culture of family institutions, community living, and caring for the more vulnerable of the society. He came from a culture where men were self-sufficient, hard working, and capable of organizing the routine business of daily life for themselves and their family (Hillard, 1995, Budge, 1928). He was accustomed to an intricate and organized social stratum. Whether rich or poor, the African man who was brought to America as a slave came with a history of successfully caring for himself, his family, and his community. Bennett (1993) characterizes these men of Africa as successful when he makes the comment,

The individuals who emerged from this African chrysalis were courageous and creative. They were not soft; they were hard. They had fought the tsetse fly and hundreds of nameless insects, and they had

survived. They had wrested from the hungry jungle gaps of land and they had found time to think beautiful thoughts and to make beautiful things. They were used to hard work and they were accustomed to an elaborate social code. If they were aristocrats or rich merchants or priests - if, in short, they belonged to the upper classes, as did some who came to America in chains, they were used to political responsibility, to giving orders and taking them, to making and altering rules, to governing. (p. 26)

Trade and commerce flourished in Africa. There was the trans-Saharan trade consisting of agricultural products of wheat, sugar, fruit, salt and textiles. The currency used as the basis of facilitating those trades was gold. Merchants, scholars, farmers, businessmen, artisans, clerics and politicians --- successful African men --- were all a part of the flourishing civilization of pre-European colonial Africa. The African man, along with his African woman, was at the core of this successful and arguably enviable lifestyle.

...the black woman of these cities were "of surpassing beauty." They were neither downtrodden nor meek, these women. ... "Their men show no signs of jealousy

whatever" and the women "show no bashfulness before men and do not veil themselves." (p. 16)

Family, friends, viable livelihood, cultural growth and choices were all part of the success factor.

In addition to political stability, intellectualism, thriving commerce, and strong family life, religion was a major component in the culture of the African man before European colonization. Religion and spirituality were at the essence of the African man, playing a role in every aspect of his daily life. That spirituality survived even after he reached American shores. Bennett (1993) says of the African Man's religion, "Of whatever tongue, of whatever color, Africans were a deeply religious people." Every aspect of his life whether political, philosophical, or social, was imbued with the religion of his culture.

The social life of ancient African cities as Timbuktu has been compared to that of modern day Paris and New York. It may well have been the indulgent life of social excess that led to the downfall of not a few of the ancient African empires. Various scholars in academe have differing viewpoints on the fall of Africa as a thriving world empire.

W.E.B. Du Bois said it fell before the triphammer blows of two of the world's great religions, Islam and

Christianity. Other students cite the difficulties of defense in the open Sudanese savannah and the corrupting influence of the slave trade. Es-Sadi who wrote the *Tarikh al-Sudan* in the dying days of the Songhay Empire, advanced another reason --- social dissolution. The people, he said, had grown fat and soft on luxury and good living. "At this moment, " he said, "faith was exchanged for infidelity; there was nothing forbidden by God which was not openly done ... Because of these abominations, the Almighty in his vengeance drew upon the Songhai the victorious army of the Moors." (p. 19)

Although great scholars may argue and debate the reasons for the fall of Africa as a great empire in the ancient world, the fact remains that it did fall. It collapsed to European penetration and a slave trade that "debased much that was vital in African culture." (p. 22) The collapse notwithstanding, African civilization as a world empire, controlled by African men, existed well before European colonization.

#### *European Penetration of Africa and the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade*

Black (1993) researched the narratives of both slave and free Africans from 1794 to 1863, to gain insight into

their concept of manhood. His findings established that when the African man arrived in America, his model of manhood was based on a history of West African traditions of four concepts. Those concepts were: 1) boyhood rites of passage, 2) husband hood, 3) fatherhood, and 4) demonstrated virility. African men also had a sense of family centeredness, self-control, identity with a spiritual life, strong sense of purpose, and self-confidence (Black, 1993; Hillard, 1995). How then is it possible to enslave a man as here described? The only sure method is to take his mind. Stripping the African man of his sanity was at the core foundation of the American Institution of slavery.

European penetration and colonization into African started innocently enough with the trade of spices and textiles and slowly a market developed for human capital. The trade in human bondage began first with the Portuguese and Europe, then the Spaniards and Europe, and eventually to the newly developed American colonies and Europe. It was out of a need for a cheap, dependable labor force that slavery in the new world took root. It was by stripping the newly arrived African of everything that made him a human that the institution of slavery was able to thrive. Family, language, religion, history, and culture were all

taken from the newly arrived slave. He was set up to subsist in a sociological, psychological and spiritual vacuum where he was not allowed to keep his name. He had a new worldview created for him where others controlled his actions and thoughts.

Woodson (1933) stated, "When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions." When you strip a man of everything that makes him who he is--- country, culture, language, mother, father, wife, children, his dignity, his God, and his name --- you can enslave him. That is exactly what the American institution of slavery did to the African man. The American institution of slavery stripped the African man of everything that made him a human being. It was a well-designed plan, based solely on race, by evil, greedy men and women, many of whom worshiped faithfully each Sabbath morning and espoused the mercy and compassion of an all-seeing God. The horrors of the trans Atlantic slave trade extended over two hundred years but the legacy of slavery is with America even today (Bennett, 1993; Franklin, 1947).

## Historical Background of the African-American Man: American Beginnings

The second part of the literature review focuses on the historical background of the successful African-American man from the time of his arrival in the Americas. The researcher examines the systematic oppression and the legal reign of terror on the successful African-American man in the United States. This section includes three parts: (a) the roots of oppression, (b) the role of spirituality, and (c) self-validation of the African-American male.

From the historical perspective, the researcher looked back to the advent of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade with the original plot to assassinate the black male image by portraying him not as a man but as a beast (Hutchinson, 1994).

### *Roots of Oppression*

Black males were first introduced into the American system as a type of beast of burden, chained and shackled like so many oxen to be used on plantations. Like oxen and other farm animals they were often beaten and shackled at the neck and feet as they worked in the fields. When they became too old or sick to work, their fate was the same as the other beasts on the plantation (Franklin, 1947). These

Black men were seen as animals to be fed, bred and trained what to do. They were never seen as subjects with intelligence and thought processes who were capable of thinking, rationalizing, or defining and reading their own world (Freire, 1999). The Black man was not seen as having a culture to be respected. He was neither seen as a man nor in fact even as a human. So then using perverted logic, it can be argued that beasts have no voice therefore how can one listen to them? Even after slavery, through the Black Codes, Jim Crow, Discrimination and Segregation, the African-American man was never seen as a full man. The social justice system and the Constitution of the United States said that he was not a full man. Even after legal segregation was outlawed, there are those who felt that the progress was only an illusion and the African-American man is no better off now than he was before desegregation (Adair, 1984). From slavery to the present, since the African-American man has never been allowed the status of a "man", his voice has never been given status and respect.

From a historical perspective, there has been no need in Western culture to consider any serious, positive studies of the African-American man because it was not until the civil rights act of 1964 that he was considered to be a man (Hrabowski, 1998). "The African-American male



has had moments of greatness yet constantly teeters on the narrow edge of social and personal sanity" (Williams, 1999). This is in great part due to how he is perceived and treated by society. Franklin (1999) and Parham (1999) also spoke to the precarious position of the African-American man's sanity in their research on the invisibility syndrome in African descent people. Parham (1999) states,

...repetitious exposure to racist incidents (discrimination, insensitive remarks, etc.) or the perception of racism in others' behaviors provides an emotionally charged social context that continually reminds Black men of how outward manifestations (i.e., skin tone) are used as justifications for inappropriate or inhumane treatment by the larger White society. Their life, then, is believed to be characterized by a series of sociocultural challenges that test their ability to successfully navigate the pathways of life without losing their sanity in the process (p. 795).

The image of the African-American man is rooted from slavery, based on myths and lies related to his nature and sexuality. The heinous nature of these lies perpetuates an atmosphere where African-American men are demonized and feared by white men because of their supposed brute

strength and by white women because of their supposed sexual prowess. When listening to the same lies long enough, they can begin to sound like truth. "We have to undo the millions of little white lies that America told itself and the world about the American Black man." (Killens, 1964) Laws enacted after slavery are based on the same myths and lies of portraying the African man as a hypersexual, mentally defective beast without a soul who needs to be tamed and controlled. Add to those myths and lies the very sobering fact that emancipation of the slaves had the potential to take the bottom out of the economy of the South, slaves were left in a dreadfully unstable situation after the Emancipation Proclamation.

The South was looking at billions of dollars in lost labor and property snatched away with the signature of a pen and the presence of the Union army. As a result, in 1865 and 1866, the legislative bodies of many of the states of the Deep South enacted the Black Codes, which were a legal method of reviving the plantation system by curtailing the freedom and restricting the economic options of newly freed African-American men (Davis, 1970). Some of the restrictions of the Black Codes included:

1. Life in prison for interracial marriage

2. African-American men had to carry a certain amount of money (usually excessive) or they would be declared vagrant and then sentenced to work on a white plantation
3. Prohibited misspending one's money (decided by the sheriff)
4. It was illegal to walk the street after dark
5. Children whose parents were impoverished were turned over to the state and hired out on white plantations indefinitely
6. It was illegal to be unemployed. Punishment was imprisonment or hired out to a white plantation.
7. African-American men had to have written proof (from a white person) of housing and employment.

Penalties for violating the Black Codes included corporal punishment, indentured servitude, exorbitant fines and imprisonment at the discretion of the court. Violation in many instances meant that an African-American man's labor was hired out (without benefit of pay or compensation) to a white plantation owner or white farmer who otherwise could not afford to pay wages to a laborer. The Black Codes were a legalized, state mandated reign of terror on African Americans. When accused, if an African-American man spoke up in his own defense or in defense of

another ex-slave, he was tortured, beaten, or lynched. The Black Codes were designed by the southern states to force African-Americans back into slavery. After the Emancipation Proclamation, farmers and plantation owners would not hire African-American men when all they had to do was wait until the ex-slave violated one of the Black Codes. An ex-slave could be arrested based solely on the word of a white man (no proof was necessary) that he had in some way violated one of the Codes. If an African-American man could find no employment, he faced imprisonment. Rather than go to prison where he faced certain death on the chain gangs, the African-American usually went back to work on the plantations from which he was recently freed. Any minor offense could result in forced servitude for life. African-American men were afforded absolutely no protection under the law and thus they were often intimidated, brutalized, attacked, and murdered by hostile whites or groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (Woodward, 1974). The purpose of the Black Codes was to maintain economic stability in the south and to perpetuate a white-dominated hierarchy through systematic oppression and legalized terror of recently freed African-Americans (Franklin, 1947). African-American men had no voice.

Following Reconstruction, the Jim Crow laws of the late nineteenth century served the same purpose as the Black Codes. The Jim Crow laws were prevalent in states of the upper South (including Washington D.C.) and also in the North. Again, the legislature of the United States imposed a system of laws and regulations specifically designed to enforce racial segregation and discrimination (Bennett, 1993; Franklin, 1947).

Shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation, ex slaves were living under the protection of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the Constitution. African-Americans had been given their freedom, granted citizenship, and by the Fifteenth amendment, African-American men were given the right to vote. But many Southern states used cruel and violent tactics to deny African-American men their constitutional right to vote. There were also Northern states that were denying African-American men their right to vote. Poll taxes, literacy tests, violence, intimidation, and discriminatory laws were being used to continuously dehumanize the African-American man. In her book *The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to my Children and Yours*, Marion Wright Edelman (1992, p.23) makes the statement " It is utterly exhausting being Black in America --- physically, mentally, and emotionally.

...there is no respite or escape from your badge of color." Edelman's statement is a powerful social commentary on the lack of progress on African-American civil rights. One would think the statement was made in 1892 but it was made in 1992.

### *Role of Spirituality*

During slavery, a growing number of missionaries and others began to have a changing view of the slave. They began to think that maybe the African-American did have a soul and if he did, they, the missionaries, should try to save it. As a result, some of the slaves were taught to read the bible in an effort to convert them to Christianity and thereby save their souls. The first institution that was established in the Americas for the slaves was the Black Church (Franklin, 1947).

Most times the slaves were not allowed to have a worship service or meeting unless a white person was present. But on some occasions, on some plantations, they were allowed to meet, worship, and pray without the presence of whites. When this happened, it allowed the African-American man a sense of control and autonomy. As a result, it was the African-American preacher who came to be reputed in many instances as the leader and the voice of the slaves. Both the slaves and the plantation master

accorded him this office of respect (Franklin, 1947).

The Black Church was the first institution that served as a support system for the African-American man. It was within the community of the church that he could find a temporary healing place from the daily bombardment of the dehumanizing insults of slavery.

*Self-Validation of the African-American Male*

The physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion of dealing with the everyday racism and lies can begin to take a psychological toll. Hooks (1993) touched on this heavy psychological toll when she said "It is important that Black people talk to one another, that we talk with friends and allies, for the telling of our stories enables us to name our pain, our suffering, and to seek healing." (p. 16). When a successful African-American man reaches back to his ancestors, to the source of his creation, for the guiding principles of spirituality, family centeredness, self-worth, manhood, and self, and speaks the truth of who he is, to what extent is his voice heard? There are certain psychological coping skills and resilience factors that distinguish successful African-American men. They have a high degree of self-reliance, they have integrity, they accept themselves, and they tend to have balance in their lives (Edwards, A. & Polite, C.K., 1992).

### Sociological Impact of the Legacy of Slavery

The third part of the literature review examines the sociological impact of the legacy of slavery on successful African-American men. The researcher examines writings tracing the development, function, and role of social institutions and support systems for successful African-American men.

The legacy of slavery had an indelible sociological impact on the African-American man and his future success. The review of the literature in this area is divided into four sections outlining the sociological impact of the legacy of slavery on successful African-American men: (a) African-American men: in their own words defining success (b) social factors influencing success, (c) the impact of television media and print journalism on the image of successful African-American men, and (d) the health issues and empowerment of African-American men.

#### *African-American Men: In Their Own Words, Defining Success*

As part of the literature review, the researcher felt it was necessary to have African-American men who had not formally been identified and recognized as successful, give voice to their definition of Success. Following are the responses of five African-American men who provided a response to the question "As an African-American man, how



do you define success?" Most of the respondents' first thoughts were from the view criticized by Harris, S. M. & Majors, R. (1993) who stated,

Historically, the values and assumptions of Euro-Americans have formed the foundation for the laws, policies, rules, and regulations of institutions. Those values have also been promoted and accepted as the standards, and beliefs, and behaviors according to which all Americans should be evaluated. As the population demographics continue to become more ethnically and racially representative of the world in general, adherence to norms that ignore the experiences of other cultural groups will be detrimental to middle-class Euro-Americans and those of other cultural backgrounds.

The systematic avoidance of the role of cultural values in cross-cultural interactions limits information...(P. 227)

Most of the respondents shared that until they were asked to define success as an African-American man, they had always looked at success from the dominant culture's viewpoint because that was the environment in which they lived and worked.

Two respondents mentioned that at one time the standard was that you had to achieve a higher standard of living than your father. If you accomplished that goal, you were a success. Two other participants thought about dictionary definitions of success. (Cleophus Webb, personal communication, February 26, 2001) states, "The dictionary defines success as achieving one's desire of wealth, fame or position of power, and to large degree, by American standards people in our society are judged by these standards alone."

One of the participants who grew up in the South recalled how having a position in the post office was considered to be one of the most esteemed positions for African-American males in the 50's.

I think back to my childhood growing up in the segregated southern city of Richmond, VA, this background has had a most profound influence as to how I picture success. The influence of my mother and father raising a family of ten children and making a conscious decision to have my mother be a stay-at-home mom. My father worked sometimes two to three simultaneous jobs, until he joined the Post Office. The position in the Post Office was considered to be one of the premier positions for black males in those

days. (M. Johnson, personal communication, March 15, 2001)

Three respondents said that they considered their fathers to be successful even though they never had much money. All respondents mentioned the nurturing, love, spiritual and moral guidance they were given as children.

My father was my role model, and thus, I think he had the most influence on my perception of what success is to me. Because of my father, I learned the following:

1. That money was not going to be a criterion of mine in the success formula. It was demonstrate that you did not have to have a lot of money to be happy.
2. I was taught that if you worked hard, that good things would come to you.
3. The influence of family was indelibly printed on my psyche.
4. To have respect, and to be respected by others was very, very important.
5. Family would always be my number one priority.
6. That I would be nothing if I neglected my spiritual life. (M. Johnson, personal communication March 15, 2001)

The importance of family, maintaining spirituality, and overcoming racism were reoccurring themes in defining success.

The achievement of one's goals in life through hard work and determination. Overcoming the adversity that comes with being Black, and earning the respect of family, friends and co-workers. To have a family that is loving and supportive of one another. To rear children that are both nice and successful human beings. To maintain the spiritual and moral base that has allowed me to achieve all of the above. (M. Johnson, personal communication, March 15, 2001)

When I see success in my fellow man, I see a man who's not over his head in debt, goes to the doctor on a regular basis, looks after his children, but not to a degree that he's taking care of them after college, etc. I see a man who goes to church, not every Sunday, unless by choice. A man who checks on his parents at least once a week if they're still living. Having friends you can call whenever and know they're glad to hear your voice. (A. J. Merriweather, personal communication, February 26, 2001)

In my estimation, success is achieving any goal that an individual sets for himself and then has the determination to pursue it in spite of any setbacks or mishaps that occur on the way. I am by no means saying that wealth, fame or power don't matter, it's just that I 'm not of the opinion that it matters to most people. (Cleophus Webb, personal communication, March 15, 2001)

I think the standards used in our society to judge a person's value were programmed into us by the print media, the electronic media along with "Madison Avenue" advertisers simply as a means to keep "Joe Six Pack" thinking that no matter what level he has achieved in life, there was always more that he could have; like bigger, better, new and improved, one of a kind, the collectors' item, etc. The American standard for success was designed and developed to fuel the American economy. For me, the measure of success should be, "whatever makes you happy."  
(Cleophus Webb, personal communication, March 15, 2001)

Success is attaining a level of achievement in life that is measured not by what one has but by the quality of the choices one is at liberty to make; and

those choices increasingly relate to what one can contribute to others rather than what one can garner for oneself. (J. Evans, personal communication, March 23, 2001)

For C. Smith, the focal point of success was wife, family, home, and being a good provider. He very poignantly states,

When you can meet a nice lady, marry her and have children, that to me is success. Being a good father and a good dad, having a house and a decent job to pay for the house means success. The experience of helping my children to be successful, makes me successful. (C. Smith, personal communication, May, 16, 2001).

As the researcher analyzed the responses of these five respondents for generative themes, she found the same themes that were in the review of the other literature. The themes of family, friends and community were very much present.

### *Social Factors Influencing Success*

Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif (1998) employed a qualitative method to study the role of the family environment as a success factor for high achieving African-American males. They wanted to show that parental

determination, academic engagement, strict discipline and community connectedness could offset the negative elements of a poor neighborhood, inadequate schools, and negative peer pressure. The four core themes resulting from the study were: (1) determined and persistent academic engagement, (2) strict limit setting and discipline, (3) love, support, communication and modeling, and (4) community connectedness and resources.

The significance of the problem in their study was clearly established. The study took a look at 60 African-American males, achieving at the highest academic levels. The subjects had all entered college with strengths in the academic areas of science and engineering. The parents of half of the subjects were college-educated. The stated goal of each subject was to earn a Ph.D. or a medical degree. The hypothesis of the researchers was that although these students were academically successful and from middle class families, unless they had a supportive family environment, the odds were stacked against their success in college. Within the family structure, the source of the strength most frequently mentioned for the subjects, was the mother. This fact held true whether the subject was from a single-parent home or a two-parent home. Hrabowski states, "...and when asked why they succeed, many

young men suggest that if they did not, "my mother would kill me!" (p. 6)

The researchers felt that it was important to study this population because some observers would think that such a group of high achievers would automatically be successful. The data collected, along with a review of the literature, showed that this was not the case.

...the chances are extremely slim that they will succeed, especially in science or engineering. In 1995, for example, we find that while 73.4 percent of Black males twenty-five years old and over had completed four or more years of high school (in contrast to 83.0 percent of White males), only 13.6 percent had completed four or more years of college (contrasted with 27.2 percent of White males).

Moreover, while 19,298 White males earned bachelor's degrees in the sciences in 1994, only 1,063 African American males did. And even more alarming, in contrast to the 7,573 White US citizens who earned Ph.D.'s in the sciences in 1995, only 207 African Americans received Ph.D.'s in science. (p. 5)

The data also showed that the threats and tensions associated with drugs and violence are as pervasive in the upper and middle class as in the lower and underclass. The



researchers focused on high achievers and their parents for two reasons: (1) to "identify attitudes, habits, behaviors, perspectives, and strategies.... involving Black male behavior and academic performance" (p. 6), and (2) to provide role models for African-American males other than sports figures and entertainers.

The researchers adequately discussed sampling factors and cultural factors. They acknowledged that the majority of their participants came from the state of Maryland and all came from the Meyerhoff Scholars Program. They also acknowledged that the parent sampling could have certain limitations because in speaking with only the parents who wanted to be interviewed, this factor might have limited the study to the more highly motivated parents. The systematic and meticulous presentation of the investigation and the candid acknowledgment of the limitations lend themselves to a strong research study. The main strength of the study was the thoroughness of the research. A place for improvement might be to take a program from a different part of the country, but similar to the Meyerhoff Scholars Program and perform a cross analysis of data.

As with participatory research, where the voice of the participant is so important, the Hrabowski, Maton & Greif

(1998) study is best summarized in the words of the researchers.

In listening to the voices of the fathers, mothers, and young men, we sense a keen awareness of the challenges that young Black males face in our society, and a strong determination to overcome the daunting odds against success. We look at factors that contribute to the problems, including unemployment, stress, pressures of multiple jobs (resulting in less time for child-rearing), crime, racism, inadequate schools, and adverse peer pressure, among others. (p. 19)

For African-American men, the nurturing family environment is as important today as it was to the African man in Ancient Africa before European penetration and the Trans Atlantic slave trade. Hrabowski, Maton & Greif (1998) concur with Bennett (1993) that family and the family environment play a major role in the success of African descent males.

Another study on factors influencing successful African-American men was done by Franklin, C. W. & Mizell, C. A. (1995). They found that in addition to a supportive family environment, there were at least six other influential factors for successful African-American men.

Those factors were: (1) positive self-concept, (2) high self-esteem, (3) upward mobility, (4) various coping strategies, (5) awareness of discrimination, and (6) a degree of religiosity. The strength of the study was that it was heavily weighed with a review of the literature. But its weakness may have outweighed this strength. Unstructured interviews, using open-ended questions, were held with 15 self-identified middle class African-American men from an "accidental sample of interviewees". This factor could well be a weakness in the study since sampling should be intentional and systematic rather than accidental. Income range of the men was \$30,000 to \$60,000. All of the men had either received terminal degrees or were in the process of receiving them. Each man was interviewed for two to four hours; the interview was recorded, and transcribed. Methodology of the study was vague with no mention of variables, research design, or hypotheses. The most specific statement relating to the methodology was that the results were based on the "realities of the fifteen upwardly mobile African-American men" (p. 196). There were approximately 45 hours of transcribed interviews but only 6 direct quotes were used in the findings of the study.

Simms, K. B. , Knight, D. M. and Dawes, K. I. (1993) conducted a more inclusive study on the institutional factors that influence academic success of African-American men. Although their study was limited to academic success, the study was thorough. Their findings show that teacher attitudes and expectations, teaching approaches to course content, and mentoring at all academic levels and racism, have a major influence on the academic success of African-American men. In spite of the institutional factors, many African-American men have the resiliency and determination to succeed.

Zaff (1995) wanted to examine why some African-American men are more resilient to the effects of racism than others. The researcher wanted to have African-American men define success based on their own ethnic identity. Nine African-American men were given a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. His findings created a two-tiered stratification of ethnic solidarity and multiethnic solidarity. While both groups were found to possess a high level of resiliency, the ethnic solidarity group found their resiliency was centered more in their immediate community than was the multiethnic solidarity group. Although monetary gains had been used as a success criterion for the dominant culture, "an

Africentric culture may see success on a more collectivist plane, with communal goals as a priority over individual achievement" (p. 3). Implications of the study were that strong success appeared to coincide with strong ethnic identity.

Taylor-Griffin (2000) studied the success factors for 28 high-achieving African-American men aged 35-55+ years. The researcher wanted to take a look at the nurturing behavioral settings of the participants to see what role if any a nurturing environment played in helping the men achieve success. All of the participants were reared in disadvantaged communities. The hypothesis for the researcher was that "for achievement oriented black male adolescents, a community of like-minded individuals were needed to expand and support their positive goal direction" (p. v). For the researcher, the community of like-minded individuals could be found in settings such as sports teams, youth centers, church groups, school and community gyms, street corner gatherings and the like. The researcher also suggests that these settings serve as buffers and refuges from racism and negative feedback from a disadvantaged community. The findings of the researcher was that these community settings did in fact play a major role in the success factor for these 28 upwardly mobile

subjects who in the mainstream culture were to a large extent marginalized and voiceless.

From a sociological perspective, marginalization and denial of the African-American male voice can lead to life threatening problems for African-American men. Some of these problems include social isolation, hypertension, and homicide (Hatter & Wright, 1993). To guard against problems of social isolation, hypertension, homicide, suicide, rage, violence, drug abuse, anti social behavior, self hatred, and the like, African-American men benefit when they can create communities of resistance, circles of love, and healing places for themselves (hooks, 1999). The research demonstrates that some of the historical "communities of resistance" have evolved around the African-American Church, African-American fraternal organizations, African-American civic groups, Literary Guilds, and African-American professional societies. These buffers against the onslaught of everyday racism have served as a cornerstone for Black resistance and success in post slavery America (Franklin & Anderson, 1978).

*Impact of Television Media and Print Journalism on the  
Image of Successful African-American Men*

The image of the Black man as a deviant, hypersexual, mentally defective beast was created during the European

conquest of Africa. Continuing to depict the African-American man in this manner has created a lucrative growth industry with filmmakers, recording artists, talk show hosts, and book writers (Hutchinson, 1996). When one considers this limited but far reaching social worldview of the African-American man, and why this worldview is perpetuated (money), it is understandable then why studies on the achievement factors affecting successful African-American men have come out only within the past twenty years (Harris, W. G. & Boudreaux, G. D., 1999).

As long as the African-American man is portrayed as something subhuman, bestial, deviant, and hypersexual, there is a mystique that surrounds him. Stimulating stories can be made as to his phenomenal sexual escapades and his deviant mental defects. History has proven that when the media puts out such stories of African-American men, people will pay money to see and read them. Seeing himself constantly portrayed as something he is not, has a psychological affect on the African-American male.

Out of fear, prejudice, and economic exploitation, television media and print journalism have presented a distorted and non-embraceable view of the African-American man (Hall, 1993; Page, 1997). The power of television media and print journalism cannot be underestimated. In

1988, a state governor running as a US presidential candidate was all but eliminated when the opposition party exploited a situation of an African-American convict on furlough who robbed, raped, and assaulted a Fort Washington couple. The convicted felon, Willie Horton, was portrayed in the media as a sex-crazed beast with a proclivity for preying on the European-American community. A powerful political campaign add, based on instilling racial fear, was created from this incident (Schram, 1990). Willie Horton had been an inmate in the state where the governor was running as a presidential candidate. The message was too strong to be missed.

In another incident, shortly after the Willie Horton episode, a prominent white businessman accused an unidentified African-American of shooting him and killing his pregnant wife in a robbery attempt. When news of the story broke, the newspapers couldn't print papers fast enough to feed the frenzied public's need to know how safe were they and what was law enforcement doing to protect the public. The Boston newspapers "filled their pages with horrific stories about desperate, violence-prone young black men terrorizing the city. Men such as these were capable of anything, and the Stuart murder proved it" (Hutchinson, 1997, p.33). African-American men were



stopped at random on the streets of Boston and interrogated.

...black Bostonians knew that there would be hell to pay. They braced themselves for the furious onslaught. It came fast. For days, dozens of police roamed the streets of Mission Hill and the surrounding black areas looking for suspects. The horror stories began almost immediately. Young black men told scary tales of police making them crawl, kneel, and lie belly down on the ground while they conducted record checks on them. Others told how police made them pull their pants down in public streets while they searched them. Dozens were hauled away for questioning. Others were arrested on a variety of charges. Some were beaten (Hutchinson, 1997, p. 33)

Although no clear evidence existed to support an arrest, a thirty-nine year old African-American man was charged, and held but the court later tossed out the case. The accused man was only released after it was discovered that the incident was an elaborate scheme of fraud and robbery, fabricated by the white businessman, who subsequently killed himself (Hall, 1993).

In October 1994, South Carolina mother Susan Smith claimed that an African-American man hijacked her car with

her two little boys hooked in the back seat. For weeks, Ms Smith went on national television pleading for the kidnapper to take care of her babies and return them safely home. The Today Show played a video of Susan Smith playing lovingly with her children at a birthday party. Shortly thereafter, she confessed to a hoax; to killing her own children and making up the lie about the African-American male carjacker (Page, 1997).

In all of these incidents, people at the center of the action were aware that once they mentioned African-American men as the perpetrators and culprits, the stories would take on a life of themselves with the media frenzy. These incidents sadly reflect the internalized racial knowledge of mainstream America that has been created to a large degree by the portrayal of African-American men in television media and print journalism as violent, angry, uncontrollable, sex-crazed beasts. The message about race and racism at the center of these three incidents is not widely discussed. Susan Smith and the white businessman Chuck Stuart knew the hue and cry they would get when they said the words African-American man just as much as the political strategist who sculpted the negative campaign add using the image of Willie Horton. Not only were they aware of the reaction they would receive, they were comfortable

with it because they were operating from the focal point of the internalized concept of accepted race and racism in mainstream America. They had been mass-media-fed over many years what mainstream America thinks of African-American men. Hall (1993) states, "Given the inhuman portrayal of the African-American man as beast, television is ... most destructive."

Not often enough are African-American men portrayed in television media and print journalism in ways that illustrate their humanity. The constant, unrelenting negative portrayal can begin to produce adverse affects for the African-American man.

#### *Health Issues and Empowerment of African-American Men*

Hatter & Wright (1993) took a look at the health impact on African-American men when dealing with the difficult every day experiences of American mainstream culture. The researchers viewed the mainstream definition of masculine and masculinity as not always encompassing the culture of the African-American man and thereby creating some areas of friction. In areas where this friction leads to inappropriate behavior and serious health risks, the researchers encouraged the intervention and efforts of community and social institutions. Balcazar (1993) also suggests the intervention of strong community groups to

reduce social problems that exacerbate the health and well being of African-American men. His research showed that in addition to community groups serving as a buffer and refuge to prejudice and obstacles, they also served to personally empower African-American men by encouraging community involvement. The research of Harris and Majors (1993) came to the same conclusions, that African-American men can be empowered by the community groups of their environments.

In addition to evaluating the effect of community groups on empowering African-American men, Harris and Majors (1993) considered the influence of cultural factors specific to African-American men. The researchers wanted to correlate the values of American institutions with the values of African-American men as it relates to empowerment and success. Value orientation or one's worldview is central because it determines for the individual what is important. Researchers have theorized that one's worldview contributes to one's behavior and lifestyle (Carter, 1990; Carter & Helms, 1987; Sue, 1978). Differences in worldviews can lead to a breakdown in communication. When the worldview of the community members is not aligned with the worldview of the community institutions, there will be a mismatch and empowerment will not take place. Community institutions, if they are to be of benefit to the larger

community, must have worldviews in alignment with the community members. This alignment will enhance the empowerment and social health of the community members.

There is a need for more intervention research on the health and empowerment of African-American men, more specifically, successful African-American men. Most studies of African-Americans concentrate either on issues of the family or on issues of women. African-American men in the research have been relegated to the position of invisible (Balcazar, 1993; Hall, 1981; Parham, 1999; Taylor-Griffin, 1988). The invisibility makes them susceptible to discrimination and prejudice, which limits their opportunities for success and can adversely affect health and general well being. It makes the American dream of a decent job, a house and an education, an unattainable aspiration. The research is needed so that methodological interventions can be made that will aid African-American men in attaining their full aspirations. Balcazar (1993) states,

Researchers can play a role in promoting social change by designing interventions that enable communities to take control over those environmental features that impede development and growth. Each such effort is a

step in a long march toward freedom and social justice  
(p. 284).

#### Psychology of Success for African-American Men

The final phase of the literature review looks at the psychology of African-American success within a framework of (M.E.E.S.) mundane extreme environmental stress (Carroll, 1998). The researcher examines literature on the effective coping skills and resiliency factors associated with living with everyday racism. There are three parts to the last section of the review: (a) invisibility syndrome in successful African-American men, (b) racial identity development, and (c) mundane extreme environmental stress (MEES). (Carroll, 1998)

Communities of resistance notwithstanding, the psychological impact of hundreds of years of being marginalized and ignored has not gone unfelt. The researcher investigated some of the psychological factors involved in living with everyday racism and the various strategies of resistance and resiliency that successful African-American men employ. The research showed that when these various coping strategies are incorporated into daily life activities, the results could lead to a successful life style in spite of the daily injustice, marginalization

and racism.

Tatum (1997) describes racism as smog that permeates American society. Many Black men succumb to the stress of this constant racism with negative behavior but most do not (Gary, 1981). Sadly, it is the minority of African-American men exhibiting negative social behavior that gets the press while for the majority of African-American men who are working hard everyday, raising their families and contributing to their communities, their voices go unheard (Hutchinson, 1994). American society is bombarded with the image of the African-American male exhibiting violent, unacceptable, anti-social behavior. Without adequate coping skills for the Black male, the psychological damage done by such social brainwashing could be devastating.

Four authors from the research speak very clearly to these coping skills. Beverly Tatum (1997) in her book *"Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?": and Other Conversations About Race* speaks to the importance of racial identity development and the importance of being able to identify where one is, in the various steps of racial identity.. Feagin and Sikes (1994) in their book *Living with Racism: The Black Middle-Class Experience*, go extensively into coping skills from preparing children to deal with discrimination to using humor, to talking with

close friends, to validating experiences. Carroll (1998) in her research on mundane environmental stress on African-Americans concludes how strategies of prayer, sleep and denial are often used as coping tactics. All four of these authors give very practical tips on successful coping skills when dealing with the social and psychological assaults of everyday racism, the type of insidious racism that becomes a daily part of the African-American man's life (Essed, 1990).

#### *Invisibility Syndrome*

Franklin (1999) defines invisibility as "an inner struggle with the feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism" (p.761). He frames the invisibility syndrome against the backdrop of racial identity development to show how racial identity development can be a buffer and effective coping tool in managing the stress from psychological invisibility. It is the unrelenting encounters with racism and prejudice over an extended period of time, which creates the invisibility syndrome. At the core of the invisibility syndrome is how does an African-American man maintain his humanity, self-worth, and cultural integrity when continuously struggling with invisibility. This dilemma is not new. It was



addressed by Du Bois (1903) when he discussed the dissonance of African-Americans trying to exist in two societies, one white and one black. Conflict, discord, and confusion arise because the rules and expectations for the African-American man in each society is fluid. The white society does not support and affirm the African-American man's humanity; and validation in the black community may not be adequate given the institutional and individual racism directed at people of African descent (Franklin, 1999; Gibbs, 1988; Jones, 1997; Parham, 1999;)

There are seven distinct elements to Franklin's (1999) invisibility syndrome paradigm,

...(a) one feels a lack of recognition or appropriate acknowledgment; (b) one feels there is no satisfaction or gratification from the encounter (it is painful and injurious); (c) one feels self-doubt about legitimacy --- such as "Am I in the right place; should I be here?"; (d) there is no validation from the experience - "Am I a person of worth?" --- or the person seeks some form of corroboration of experiences from another person; (e) one feels disrespected (this is led to by the previous elements and is linked to the following); (f) one's sense of dignity is compromised and

challenged; (g) one's basic identity is shaken, if not uprooted.

The context of the African-American community serves to counter the invisibility syndrome. It is within the African-American community --- family, church, basketball court, corner store, local bar, union hall, school, etc.--- that the African-American man can make a sanity check of his experiences. It is in the community that he can find validation and a safe refuge to share his experiences (Franklin, 1999). "... the opportunity to disclose is in and of itself healing..." Parham (1999, p. 798). The sharing of one's story is one of the most powerful coping techniques against cultural, institutional, and individual racism (hooks & West, 1991). Franklin (1999) hypothesizes, ...Corroboration and validation from a fellow African American regarding the legitimacy of one's reaction to a racially provocative incident is an ethnic/cultural practice for African Americans that bolsters protective factors against racism and serves as a device of personal resilience that helps one bounce back from an emotionally injurious encounter that threatens self-esteem (p. 781).

For Parham (1999) merely talking about the egregious racial encounter with like-minded people from one's own

culture group is not sufficient. Although this action may be healing, he feels a further step is necessary to ameliorate the invisibility syndrome:

...catharsis in this case may be insufficient to achieve closure (if that is possible). In my view, what is needed is a process whereby...works with the therapist not only to feel more empowered but to do more empowering and social advocacy to engage and/or resolve ...circumstances. Without this added dimension, African descent people may begin to internalize a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness about their ability to transform their negative circumstance into something more positive (p. 798).

#### *Racial Identity Development*

The constant bombardment of daily racial aggressions toward African-American men can put them at risk of physical and psychological health problems and make them vulnerable to early death (Braithwaite & Taylor, 1992; Franklin, 1993, 1997; Neighbors & Jackson, 1996). Possessing personal resilience and a strong racial identity, can serve as buffers to the daily cultural, institutional and individual racism encountered by African-American men. Racial identity refers to an awareness, understanding and concept of where one is in terms of

worldview, maturation, and self-validation with race. There are generally five stages of racial identity development: (1) *Pre-encounter*, where little awareness exists regarding race matters; Blacks view themselves primarily from white definitions (2) *Encounter*, an eye opening racial experience resulting in some confusion (3) *Immersion-emersion*, one becomes more race conscious, embracing all that is Black (4) *Internalization*, general acceptance of one's own racial group and others, and (5) *Internalization-commitment*, a humanistic worldview embracing and accepting all cultures. Strong racial identity development is an effective coping strategy for everyday racism (Carter, 1995; Cross, 1971; Franklin, 1999; Milliones, 1976; Tatum, 1997). Franklin (1999) states,

In many models of resilience, a race consciousness, sense of self, and personal efficacy was apparent in the face of encounters in racialized environments. Racial identity development, therefore, can be viewed as an adaptive response to racism (p.782).

*Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress (MEES)*

African Americans were defined as the ultimate counterpoint to Europeans---where they were free, we were slaves; they were cultured while we were labeled brutes; they were smart whereas we were considered

dumb; they were beautiful and we were judged ugly. In short, under this county's racial dominance paradigm Europeans were defined as human while Africans were defined as beasts fit only to be servants to a "master race." Spoken aloud...these harsh assertions grate the ear and the conscience of right-thinking Americans. But who among us can deny the truth of these assertions about America's ugly little racial secret? (Carroll, 1998, p. 131)

These words spoken by Walter Allen in his afterword to Carroll's (1998) *Environmental Stress and African Americans: The Other Side of the Moon*, appear to be the foundation for her treatise on the mundane, extreme, environmental stress suffered by African descent people living in Eurocentric America. She refers to this stress as the MEES factor. The word mundane for Carroll refers to the everyday, taken for granted, what else would you expect nature of racism. Extreme is used because of the acute, life-threatening physical and psychological effects of the racism. The word stress is used because of the debilitating effect of the racism.

...this stress kills slowly and silently taking a long-term toll through various psychosomatic, physical ailments, as hypertension, substance abuse, low infant

birth weight and high infant mortality, and poor health attitudes/behaviors that combine to give African Americans a morbidity/mortality profile more characteristic of those living in the developing world than in the industrialized world (p. 133).

Carroll (1998) views MEES as unavoidable to African-Americans based on the racial history of America. She also sees MEES as epidemic as it is so deeply rooted in American culture. Those roots of culture grew out of an America whose construct of a Black race was based on three factors: (1) involuntary immigration---slavery, (2) coloring and physical features that created castes by birth, and (3) treatment of African and African-American culture as a source of shame (Akbar, 1984).

Although the picture painted by Carroll was bleak, she did include methods to decrease MEES and thereby improve the quality of life for African-Americans. Her methods included those employed by Pierce (1969), which were to increase skills, autonomy, safety (physical and psychological) and purposeful interaction with others. From Carroll's (1997) study, her subjects used the following strategies to deal with MEES: exercise, music, talking the situation through with close friends and

family, prayer, denial, reading self-help books, sleep, self-reflection, and eating.

### Summary

As the researcher reviewed the literature on the voices of successful African-American men within an ancestral, historical, sociological and psychological framework, the research pointed out and confirmed that these voices have systematically and purposefully been stifled because of racism but they still exist. When the African man was taken from Africa, he had a voice that he used to create his world, a world of commerce, politics, culture, spirituality, cities, and empires. He was taken from a well developed and thriving civilization that manifested cultural development, political systems of order, social infrastructures, evidence of spirituality, and a sophisticated process of passing on knowledge . His manhood and humanity were in tact with a sense of family, community, self, self-worth, and a God who created him. He was validated by the world he lived in and read his own world. During the period of slavery and thereafter, African-American men were not allowed to speak. Speaking what was on one's mind usually meant death. He was taught to be ashamed of his color, his features, his language, his

culture, and his country (Akbar, 1984). Systematic oppression and a legalized reign of terror during and after slavery denied the African-American male a voice to speak.

The research also indicated that African-American male success and achievement is a phenomenon that has only been researched and measured in the last twenty years. And outside of their own communities, successful African-American men have not been afforded the opportunities to use their voices fully. The research also indicated that strong family ties as well as community involvement were key to the success of African-American males.

An ancestral, historical, sociological and psychological review of the literature on Successful African-American men was encompassing enough that the researcher was able to identify behaviors and strategies that can be utilized to increase the possibility that the voices of successful African-American men can be heard.



## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

#### Restatement of Purpose

Throughout the study, the researcher engaged five participants in dialogical reflection on those events in their lives that have helped to create their success. The researcher dialogued with five successful African-American men as they told their stories and shared their experiences that brought them to the present stages of success in their lives. Each of the dialogues was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for generative themes. The researcher problem posed with participants to investigate barriers of resistance to success, and to explore those people, situations, and events that led to success. Systems to create strategies for achievement of success were also explored. This study was conducted to construct a framework for success for future generations of African-American males.

#### Research Design and Methodology

This chapter describes the research design, methodology and analytical strategies used to identify and chronicle the mosaic of historical factors shaping the

lives of five successful African-American men. The study focused on dialogical retrospection as a method of inquiry. Participants were actively involved with the researcher in clarifying research questions, and constructing meaning through collaborative analysis (Kiefer, 1981). Participants reflected back in their lives and analyzed those events, situations, and people who were instrumental in shaping who they are today.

The researcher used a qualitative methodology of inquiry for gathering, interpreting, and reporting information for the study. Qualitative research, as a methodology, stresses understanding based on observation and verbalization. The theory behind qualitative research is that it "stresses a phenomenological model in which reality is rooted in the perceptions of the subjects" (McMillan, 1996, p.10). Qualitative methodology has a distinct advantage in that it allows an in-depth analysis and exploration of a situation from the worldview and experiences of those who are studied. Not only does the research use the worldview and experiences of those who are studied, it uses their vocabulary and lexicon (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Stanfield, 1994). Specifically, the researcher employed a participatory research methodology to address the research questions. Participatory research

constructs knowledge with people as subjects as opposed to constructing knowledge about people, as objects. In so doing, the possibility of generating new knowledge of, and insights on non-mainstream populations is enhanced. Through constructing interrelationships between participants and researcher, there is the opportunity to have the voices of marginalized populations heard (Fine, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Subjects, as active partners, collaborating throughout the research process, is a key element in participatory research as a qualitative method (Maguire, 1997). Kiefer (1981) stresses the importance of the researcher and participants as co-researchers in the creation of knowledge from the experiences of the participants. He states,

The strategy portrayed is characterized as participatory by virtue of its inclusion of its subjects as active partners throughout the research process. They are involved in preliminary research design, in interactive generation of data, and in dialogic interpretation of the data as it is generated. It is also participatory to the extent that its participants are engaged in personally meaningful critical reflections upon individual growth experience. (p.3)

Through their own life experiences, actions, thoughts, and reflections, the participants co-create their life realities. They created the base of knowledge and research, which informs the world of the reality of their life situation. Their worldview of their reality is as valid as any researcher's view. Reason (1994) writes with passion and commitment on the links between power, knowledge, and the position of privilege when it comes to research. "I understand the link between power and knowledge and realize the privileged position that I am in as a white male European academic" (Reason, 1994, p. 325).

The dialogues were conducted in an effort to construct a body of research that explains the resiliency and success of African-American men in spite of everyday, sustained and unrelenting racism. There was no more authentic place to gain the research data needed than from those subjects who had demonstrated success and resiliency. The participants themselves became subjects, capable of critical conscientization, rather than objects that supply only observable and measurable facts. Viewing participants as subjects of the research rather than objects is a major differentiating factor between traditional research and participatory research (Kieffer, 1981, Reason, 1994, Maguire, 1997).

The research then became a process of the conscientization developed and used by Paulo Freire as a problem solving method of inquiry (Freire, 1979, Kieffer, 1981). Participatory research is based on the precept that the ability to know information is not reserved to the elite and learned of academia but is in fact a human characteristic (Ada and Beutel, 1993). Therefore, who better to know why they have been resilient and successful than successful African-American men themselves? Participatory research as a method of inquiry, gives voice to the historically voiceless (Maguire, 1987). Successful African-American men have historically been rendered voiceless by the dominant society. Participatory research affords a method of listening to and exploring voices that have historically not been heard --- voices and perspectives that are missing from so much of the research in the Western World.

To gain answers to the research questions the researcher posed, it was crucial for the participants to hear and listen to their own voices as they posed their own solutions. The researcher met with and dialogued with each participant individually. There were two dialogue sessions with each of the five participants. The dialogue sessions were tape recorded with the participants' permission. Each

one of the sessions took two to three hours and each one of the participants was interviewed twice. All of the dialogue interviews were carried out over a period of six months.

Participatory research as a method of research and scientific inquiry has been employed since the 1970's when the term was used in Tanzania by people involved in restructuring the government (Maguire, 1987). Paulo Freire is also credited with the structured development of participatory research as a viable method of scientific inquiry for quantitative research. In the early 1980's, Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher and educator, began visiting the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts. He came each February to work with a group of educators on the concept of participatory research. Some of the people taking part in this "working group" each spring were: Myles Horton, from the Highlander Center in Appalachia, Rajesh Tandon of India, and Patricia Maguire from the Center for International Education. The writings of Freire use the concept of participatory research as a paradigm for transformation. Freire focuses not only on liberation but also on transformation. He focuses on liberation from being an object of oppression and powerlessness, to being transformed into a subject who

is capable of naming and thereby knowing his world. No one group has a monopoly on knowledge, "all human beings have the capacity to know" (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p. 3).

Participatory research allows the researcher and the participant to be co-researchers, in a collaborative relationship, with each bringing his knowledge to the research table. This collaboration builds trust, honesty, and openness that can lead to a more empowering dialogue as well as develop critical consciousness. Participatory research "...is a systematic approach to personal and social transformation. [It] aims to develop critical consciousness..." (Maguire, 1987, p.3).

The researcher employed a participatory research methodology to address the research questions because this methodology afforded a process of listening to, exploring, and engaging in dialogue, voices that had historically not been heard --- voices and perspectives that are missing from so much of the research in the Western World.

#### Population and Sample

The participants the researcher interviewed were five successful African-American men who were identified (from a cadre of thirty -four men and twenty-three women) by the Bay Area United Way and the African-American Community

Entrustment as five of the fifty *Portraits of Success* in the San Francisco Bay Area for 1997 George Fraser Philanthropy & Lecture Series II 50 Portraits of Success. (Available from The African American Community Entrustment, 50 California Street, Suite 200, San Francisco, CA 94111) These men and women were professionals in the age range of 45 years of age and older. All of the identified recipients had a direct personal involvement with youth and the elderly either through their job or community involvement. They had demonstrated leadership, creative vision and initiative in interacting with the African-American community. The African-American Community Entrustment and the Bay Area United Way had recognized them for their contribution of giving back to their community over a period of twenty-five years or more. They had all received local, regional and national awards and recognition for their service to the African-American Community. From the twenty-seven men identified, the researcher selected five who were willing to participate in the study.

#### Data Collection

The African-American Community Entrustment in collaboration with the Bay Area United Way had already



identified the successful African-American men used in the study. These men were identified as successful in 1997 and given a Portrait of Success award acknowledging their accomplishments. The African-American Community Entrustment is a philanthropic organization located in Oakland, California whose purpose is to increase and broaden the awareness of philanthropy in the African-American community. The Bay Area United Way is a part of the national United Way, a historical philanthropic organization with a proven track record for helping others.

Following is the step-by-step description of how the researcher collected the data and conduct the study for the investigation.

1. Made a telephone call to the Interim President of the African-American Community Entrustment explaining that the researcher was a University of San Francisco doctoral student, working on a dissertation involving the voices of successful African-American men.
2. Related to the president that the researcher was also a Portrait of Success award recipient.
3. Requested business addresses and telephone numbers for the twenty-seven 1997 male Portrait of Success Award winners.

4. Informed by Interim President that information on each Portrait of Success Award recipient was confidential and suggested researcher use information on each recipient contained in the souvenir program book and the Internet to contact perspective participants.
5. Used the Internet and the biographical souvenir book of the award winners to contact each Portrait of Success winner through their job site.
6. Made initial contacts with those Portrait of Success winners whose job site information was easiest to secure through the Internet and the souvenir book.
7. Explained to each man, through a telephone contact, why he was contacted, and invited him to be a part of the research study. The 2-4 hour time commitment was explained to each man.
8. Secured five telephone contacts with prospective participants.
9. Sent a letter of confirmation explaining the proposed participatory research process and a brief biography as a personal introduction to each of the participants. The letter informed participants that they would be contacted to set a time and place for each interview. (Appendix F)

10. Contacted each participant by telephone, and a time and place for each interview was set.
11. Sent a consent form to each participant a week before each scheduled interview stipulating that they would agree to have their dialogue interviews tape-recorded. (Appendix C).
12. Conducted the first dialogue interview, and set date when the transcript would be sent to participant for review.
13. Transcribe the first dialogue.
14. Sent copy of the first dialogue to the participant for review.
15. Scheduled a time and place for researcher and participant to go over first dialogue interview.
16. Scheduled the second dialogue interview.
17. Taped the second dialogue interview. Reviewed transcript with participant for elaboration and clarification of important data.
18. Analyzed the data and outlined the generative themes.
19. Contacted participant regarding data analysis and to see if any information needed to be clarified. Discussed the data to be included in the study and

collaborated on what would be left out due to confidentiality.

20. Allowed participants opportunity to give personal input and additional feedback on the analysis to be included in the research study.

### Setting

The fifty Portrait of Success awardees came from ten San Francisco Bay Area counties. The five successful African-American men selected from that group for this study came from 2 different counties. Dialogues with the participants were held either at the participant's place of business or a mutually agreed upon public location. The agreed upon location had a private, quiet place where a private interview dialogue could be conducted and taped in comfort. Public locations for the dialogue interviews included the County Office of Education, the City School District Office. The researcher had access to these locations.

### Questions to Guide the Initial Dialogue

Once participants agreed to take part in the study, they were provided a background questionnaire to fill out before the initial dialogue. Participants were asked to

respond to questions that included: Where were you born? What is your educational level? What is your marital status? What is your work history? What is your background in community service? The background questionnaire was returned before the initial interview. Responses to the questionnaire afforded the researcher a more thorough understanding of the background of each participant.

Under each research question below are the questions that were used to guide the initial interview dialogue.

*Research Question # 1: To what extents are the voices of successful African-American men stifled?*

1. As an African-American man, how do you define success?
2. By what barometer would you measure success, (money, personal achievement, job accomplishment, status in the community, other)?
3. To what extent does mass media affect the concept of success for African-American men?
4. To what extent does mass media affect the voice of successful African-American men?
5. Do you remember any experiences when you felt that your voice was heard and accepted solely because you were African-American?

6. Do you remember any experiences when you felt that your voice was either not heard or not acknowledged solely because you were African-American?

*Research Question # 2: How does a successful African-American man sustain his manhood in a racist society?*

1. To what extent do African-American men need to be validated by the dominant society to feel successful?
2. What keeps you balanced, in a social comfort zone when dealing with everyday racism, prejudice, and bigotry?
3. Do you remember any experiences that were uncomfortable because they were overshadowed by race?
4. What strategies have you used to counter personal racist hurts?

*Research Question #3: What societal stabilizers serve as buffers to the African-American male's emotional psyche?*

1. What are the sources of validation (of self-worth) for you as an African-American man?
2. What role have civic and religious organizations played in your success?
3. To what extent have friendships affected your achievements of success?

4. Where do you find respite?

*Research Question #4: What are the sources of validation (of self-worth) for the African-American male?*

1. As you look back, who are the people that you are glad were in your life?

2. What advice and words of wisdom would you give to young African-American men as they lay a foundation for their lives?

#### Data Analysis

One of the distinct differences between qualitative data analysis and quantitative data analysis is the analytical approach in interpreting the data. In a qualitative study such as participatory research, "...data are not abstracted into summary statistics, but allowed to speak for themselves as manifestations of different aspects of the problem" (Park, 1989, p. 14). Each dialogue was transcribed by the researcher and reviewed for content. Because the researcher personally transcribed each dialogue, this action allowed for more thorough reflection and the opportunity to pull out the generative themes and common phrases prevalent throughout each of the interview dialogues. Thereby, an analysis of the group of participants as a whole could be made through comparison

and contrast. Content from the initial dialogue served as the foundation for the second dialogue for each participant. The data was analyzed to identify themes of historical, individual, institutional and cultural oppression for African-American men and how those themes tie in to the literature, which supports the hypothesis that the voices of successful African-American men are not heard even though those voices do exist in the community. Themes related to the success factor for African-American men were also analyzed. Transforming barriers, tolerance of ignorance, and having faith to succeed were some of the generative themes related to the success factor. The researcher extracted the generative themes from each of the individual interview dialogues.

The generative themes from each of the five participants was compared, discussed, and contrasted and the general themes running through the five dialogues were analyzed. For each of the transcribed dialogues, participants had the opportunity to check for content accuracy and make clarification where necessary. Thus as co-researchers, the participants collaborated with the researcher to interpret the validity of the data collected. In making clarifications and changes to the data, the participants were "questioning the accuracy of the current



understanding, reformulating the problem based on reflection and analysis" (Ada & Beutel, 1993, P.50).

The second dialogue interview was conducted using the same method as the first. A further analysis of the data was conducted with participants for generative themes, reviewing the initial research questions. Park (1989) says of the participatory interview process, "The research process reaches a kind of crystallization point where the findings of the investigation are brought together in a systematic fashion at the end." (p. 14)

#### Background of the Researcher

I am one of seven children (four males and three females) born to a stay-at-home mother and a father who worked for over thirty years in the Bethlehem Steel Plant in Lackawanna, New York. I was born in a house right across the street from the steel mill where my father worked. We lived in upstate New York and when I was young I used to listen to my dad talk about where he was born and raised. There was always a sparkle in his smile and a tear in his eye when he lovingly talked about Merriweather Quarters in Eutaw, Alabama.

I didn't understand why he left "home" if he loved it so much. So, one day I asked him. He told me that the

reason he left in the 1930's was because "a white man lied and said I owed him some money, and I didn't". Every time I think of those words, spoken by my father years ago, they wrench my heart because it is one of the vivid examples that stay with me of the stifled voice of a successful African-American man. I don't ever remember my dad showing any anger or bitterness about the situation. I guess it was a battle he just chose not to fight. But I've stayed angry all these years and I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because of my thoughts of that sparkle in my dad's smile, the tear in his eye, and the life he might have had if he had a voice in Alabama in the 1930's.

Both of my sisters and one of my brothers have college degrees even though both of my parents stopped school around third grade.

I grew up in New York State and went through the New York State Regents System of education. I received my undergraduate degree from the University of Buffalo and a Masters Degree from Sonoma State University. My college major was English with a minor in Spanish. I taught Spanish in a Northern California high school for over twenty years. I studied in Language Schools in Cuernavaca, Mexico, Durango, Mexico, and Barcelona, Spain. I have a Clear Life California Teaching Credential, a Reading

Specialist Credential and a Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Senior Program Director Certificate.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings of the Study

#### Introduction

Each of the African-American men who participated in the study possessed a uniqueness in his personality that spoke of the journey to success that only he could have traveled. Reflections of all participants were insightful, and candid. I was surprised at the level of candor while at the same time humbled and honored that participants trusted me to tell their stories with truth and sensitivity. Freire (1999) spoke of the importance and place of humility with respect to dialogue. He stated,

...dialogue cannot exist without humility....

Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility.... How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of "pure" men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are "these people" or "the great unwashed"?...How can I dialogue if I am closed to --- and even offended by---the contribution of others? (p. 71)

Some of the wounded places of the participants' lives were still raw and painful after fifty years. Mr. Johnson shared a schoolyard incident that could have changed the course of his life.

I was a senior in high school and I had the opportunity to start dating a girl that had broken up with another guy who I knew. He and five other guys were going to chastise me. And I didn't want to be chastised. So they formed a circle around me and I had a small knife. Back in the South in those days they had a bubble gum machine and one of the prizes you would get out of the machine would be a little penknife that when it opened it was about that long. I used that penknife to break through the circle. I subsequently understood that in breaking through the circle, I stabbed him and the next day we went to school and he came from the projects and I came from another area. And in order not to have his friends involved with my friends, we decided to fight it out. And we fought and then they broke us up and carried us to the principal. I was not one of his great admirers. He called the police on the incident the

night before, which was over. The whole thing was over now that we had fought.

I ended up getting a pro bono Black attorney and went to face a white judge and everybody was saying it was self defense and even the knife I had if the cops had stopped me, it was within the legal parameters. So, I'm assuming that because I'm being ganged and I'm protecting myself, self defense. I got two years probation.

Mr. Dell shared a somewhat different kind of experience but with rawness and hurt just as fresh and through tears that seem to have caught him off guard.

I was probably one of the most outstanding basketball players ...going back. And the reason I say that is because I was All Northern California which was the highest ranking you can get as a basketball player. Unless it's All American, I don't think they had All American back then. During that time, the Pacific Coast Basketball Conference which was all the universities in the Pacific Coast Conference, they had a rule out that they could only give scholarships to two Blacks on the whole Pacific Coast. And I didn't get one. And that made me very sad.

Each interview was like riding a roller coaster with the emotions running from total elation to uncontrollable tears. In all cases, there were two on the roller coaster, researcher and participant, co-creating knowledge. Park (1989) maintains,

...with other human beings we come to know them in an interactive sense. This knowledge does not derive from analysis of data about other human beings but from sharing a life-world together---speaking with one another and exchanging actions against the background of common experience, tradition, history, and culture. (P. 1)

The successful African-American men who participated in the study provided rich information to add to the body of knowledge on African-American men. Their stories wove an intricate pattern of the American experience. Their strong sense of self, appreciation of their culture, pride in their heritage, love for their families and their communities were a binding thread interlocking all the dialogues.

An introductory profile of each participant precedes the findings. In an effort to protect privacy and confidentiality, some of the participants have chosen pseudonyms. Only general information is given for each

participant. Following the introductory profiles is the critical reflections of the dialogues organized according to the research questions. Direct quotes are used from each of the participants to reflect not only factual information but also critical, interpersonal knowledge, one of the things that define us as human beings (Park, 1993). Direct quotes are also used to illustrate the depth of the reflections and the dialectical process (Ada & Beutel, 1993; Kieffer, 1981; Maguire, 1987; Park, 1993). After critical reflections of each of the research questions, generative themes are pulled from each of the dialogues and those themes are discussed. Significant findings are analyzed.

Two dialogues were done with each participant and the findings are interwoven in the discussion of the research questions. It is to be noted that participants became more discerning, insightful, and empowered during taping of the second dialogue. As critical reflections from the first dialogue were discussed and analyzed, participants were observed to become more relaxed, open, articulate and at ease. This is as it should be when we think of the foundation of participatory research being the right of every man to read his own world and then speak his own truth of that world (Freire, 1999; Hall, 1993).



The more participants realized that their words were the foundation for the knowledge and information of the research study, the more a bond of trust developed between the participants and the researcher.

### Profiles of Participants

#### *Mr. Johnson*

Mr. Johnson has a Ph.D. and works in an executive position with a large company in the San Francisco Bay area. He is in the age range of 55-65 years. He is divorced and has three children, all over the age of 18 and out on their own. He was born and grew up in the South and came to California in the 60's. He only came to visit but decided he wanted to stay and attend college. After college, he decided to stay and has been here ever since. He attended segregated schools in the South and did not have any experiences with integration until his college years in California.

...when I went to get a Master's degree at Santa Clara, that was the first experience that I had in an environment where I was a minority. I had always been in an environment where I was a majority.

Mr. Johnson has been involved with numerous community service projects but doesn't consider himself an activist,

but rather someone who is concerned about the plight of African-American people. He donates much of his time to his community.

I have a reputation for serving wherever I can and not to charge for doing community service work. For African-American organizations, I tell them a fee and whatever they can afford to pay me, they pay me. If it's nothing then that's fine so some sense of social consciousness with a desire to give back what I have learned in honor to the community...

*Mr. Peirson*

Mr. Peirson is a community activist and the father of an adult daughter and an adult son whom he raised as a single parent. His age range is 50-60 years of age. He was born in Oakland and raised in the Richmond, Berkeley, and Oakland area where he attended elementary and high school. His first encounters with being a minority came in high school.

...growing up in Oakland, at first, I thought the world was Black. White people were odd to me and I have fond memories of those days. But we moved and I spent my third grade through ninth grade living in Berkeley. On my block you got a very distorted worldview. Our block was almost all various kinds of

integrated families. Everybody was mixed up so that it influenced your worldview. Race wasn't really a big issue to me during those days in that particular community in Berkeley. Then we moved to Richmond. I went to El Cerrito and there was a relatively small Black population and a large white population. This is when I first began really encountering the impact of being a minority. It was a very bigoted school and as Black students, we self-segregated.

Mr. Peirson was part of the military but was honorably discharged and enrolled in college in California but transferred to Howard where he graduated. His father was a professor at Howard University. After college, he worked at a television station and shortly after, moved to the San Francisco Bay area. He's been unemployed or underemployed since he's been here.

I have been unemployed or underemployed for the intervening twenty years. At some point, I got over feeling sorry for myself and began to look at the social reasons why I couldn't get a job. I had no prison record; I had a college degree. The frustration is not always being able to provide for my son. I internalized it and was very, very bitter and angry after a thousand, at least job applications. I

began to look at the causes of this and how it could happen and I began to look at and get involved in social justice issues. I have analyzed why these things happen and done what I can to improve it.

One of the things Mr. Peirson is most proud of is the computer center with the after school program that he created for the tenants of his low income housing complex. Also, that from that complex, in 1999, three kids graduated from major law schools---Stanford, Kansas, and Pepperdine.

*Mr. Dell*

Mr. Dell was born in the South and is in the age range of over 65 years. He is married and has three adult children. He is a retired government worker and currently holds an elected office. Mr. Dell came to the San Francisco Bay area during WW II with his mother, father, and two sisters. He attended elementary and high school in Northern California. During his high school years, he was active in track and field sports, standing out and making a name for himself in basketball.

I went to college, continued my basketball, and was outstanding player in the State Tournament, two consecutive years. And then the Korean War broke out and I went in the Air Force. I still continued to

play basketball. I went up to Alaska and continued to play basketball.

Mr. Dell is a veteran of the Korean War and continued to play sports with the military. It was after his military career that he joined the government where he retired with a distinguished career after paving the way for being the first Black four different times in four different areas of employment for the US government.

...thirty-seven Afro-American men applied for this one position. I was lucky enough to get it. The first Black...And it wasn't easy. But I survived. And the only way I survived is I had to be smarter than everybody in the office. I'd come home and work weekends, worked nights...And I thought it would be easy to get along with anyone but there is always some racist guys around that made it difficult...I was up for confirmation and you had to go through a strenuous background check and probably 80, 90% of the people in the office didn't want me. They fabricated lies.

[They said] I was the biggest drug dealer in [the] county. My confirmation took approximately ten to eleven months before I was approved by Congress. And it would not have happened had it not been for Bill

Burton and Allen Cranston, and the Federal Judges that were in San Francisco that knew me.

Mr. Dell is active in the community, serving on numerous boards and committees. He finds tranquility in his rose garden or his kitchen. Mr. Dell says, "I find that my most relaxing time of the day is when I'm in the kitchen. If I have the time to cook a gourmet meal for my wife, my children and my grandchildren, I'm at peace."

*Mr. Rutledge*

Mr. Rutledge was born in the North East and is in the age range of over 65. He is married and the father of three adult children. Mr. Rutledge is retired from the air force and works very closely with the distinguished Tuskegee Airmen. He is a community activist, having served on boards and committees in the San Francisco Bay area for many years. Mr. Rutledge is known and respected throughout his community. He has been involved in social justice and civil rights, winning the distinguished Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Award. Mr. Rutledge graduated from high school and has some definite feelings about college. He laments, "I know there were several jobs or positions I could have had if I had a BA or BS behind my initials but hey, that's the price I pay for making the decisions that I did."

*Mr. Moncrief*

Mr. Moncrief is the father of one adult child and one teenager. Mr. Moncrief was born in the Northeast and is in the age range of over 60. He is a decorated Viet Nam veteran and retired from the Air force. Mr. Moncrief is active in the community with youth, youth programs, and health programs. His community activities in the area of social justice and civil rights have been recognized throughout the San Francisco Bay area. Mr. Moncrief is an artist, a musician, a poet, and a free spirit.

...I sit down and play piano for hours and feel invigorated. I never comb my hair, I mean I sometimes do, but what I do is I just swim everyday. I just oil it, and I just let it go and sometimes I will comb it, but that's very symbolic to me, very, very, very symbolic. There has to be something in everybody that's free. And I cut it, and they look at me but I cannot buy total convention. I can buy some of it, conventionality, tradition, sometimes has its limitation, and there has to be something free in an individual about you whatever it is, just let it ride.

Mr. Moncrief enjoys working on his website, creating and giving personalities to the many characters he has put on line. He is currently involved with a foundation funded community action development project in the San Francisco Bay area.

### Critical Reflections Organized by Research Questions

#### Introduction

For each of the four main research questions there were questions that guided the dialogue. The responses to the questions to guide the dialogue are reflected in the findings for each of the main research questions. Although participants' responses are organized according to research questions, there was overlap and interconnectedness throughout their reflections. That is to say, none of the responses to the questions to guide the dialogue were in isolated capsules. Generative themes began to emerge as the first dialogues were transcribed.

*Research Question #1: To what extents are the voices of successful African-American men stifled?*

To begin to answer research question number one, the participants first defined success from the perspective of an African-American man. For each of them, success entailed being goal oriented, attaining personal



achievement, maintaining ethnic identity, giving back to the community, and having strong family connections. Mr. Johnson states,

...when a person has a family, strong sense of extended family, good network of friends and supporters...being able to certainly give back to the community and to have a revenue stream that would allow you to function in a society that's driven by money.

When Mr. Dell spoke of success, he included self-confidence and self-worth that he felt were difficult to maintain as a minority living in his geographical area of affluence. Mr. Dell felt,

As an African-American man, I define success as completing the goals and fulfilling the dreams I set for myself growing up--goals and dreams of not only a stable career and a sufficient income, but dreams of reaching a certain level of happiness. Such happiness, I feel, can only be felt by personal achievements, breaking through racial barriers and maintaining a significant amount of self-confidence and self-worth that one may not usually be able to maintain being a minority, especially in such an affluent community.

For Mr. Peirson, the importance of maintaining ethnic identity was central to his definition of success. He stated,

I like to think I can contribute to some social change while maintaining my ethnic identity and my integrity. The mere acquisition of material at the sacrifice of your integrity or your ethnic identity would not define success...I help contribute to making things better for African-Americans and minorities in general, while not sacrificing or trying to be something else.

Mr. Johnson also had strong feelings and pride about the connection between success and maintaining his ethnic identity. He expounded,

...this thing you call success, I don't own it, because I didn't do it by myself. I got extraordinary help from largely African-Americans in support along the way. But the most important thing is in the process, I was supposed to be assimilated, and I never did that, and I did it, and I'm still Black, and I can relate to Black people. I can go in East Palo Alto and relate, and go to Hillsborough, Atherton, I can go across the social strata, and still be me.

When speaking of a barometer by which to measure success, participants talked about what it was not in addition to what it was. Mr. Dell went into the most detail of what success was not:

It is not about obtaining a certain status within the community, because then you are aiming to impress others. It is not about acquiring a significant amount of money, because then your happiness will be empty and you will not feel self-rewarded by anything but material gain.

Mr. Johnson was very direct when he said, "It's not just money." Mr. Johnson also said that success is "dictated by the intangible," which would correlate with Mr. Peirson and Mr. Rutledge who stated that it is "internal". Mr. Johnson expanded on the intangible when he talked about what gives him the greatest sense of joy. He said,

My greatest joy comes from when I do something, and a working class person acknowledges me. See, it's more important that working class African-Americans acknowledge me, and underclass, than it is for the middle and upper class. Cause they'll be acknowledging me because I went to Stanford, and got a job that pays over \$100,000, that kind of stuff, but

these people will acknowledge me cause I'm real. And I would like to be real.

After each participant used his own words and voiced for himself a definition of success that he was comfortable with, he appeared more comfortable speaking with the voice of a successful African-American man. It seemed not to have been sufficient that each participant had been defined by an outside entity to be successful. They were more empowered by their own words that defined who they were.

As the discussion and questions that guided the dialogue began to lead to how others defined success and defined African-American men, television mass media and print journalism were discussed. Participants felt that the media portrayal of success was dangerous, unrealistic and a threat to African-American men. Mr. Johnson stated,

I think if you buy into the media either you're a failure or you're supposed to be striving to get more and more things. Powered through advertisements, they mark success by the number of material possessions you have. And that's not consistent with my definition of success.

Mr. Dell felt that because of racism and discrimination, African-American men don't have the available job opportunities to acquire the material gains

portrayed by the media. He felt that the media portrayal of success without the job opportunities might lead to crime and depression in African-American men.

It is unfortunate that the mass media in America measures success by material gain. African-American men, more specifically, are affected because of their lack of opportunity to acquire such material gain. Because African-American men are not given the same opportunities as their white counterparts, they seek other avenues to reach a certain level of "success". After feeling the after effects of unequal opportunity, they may rob, steal or kill just for the chance to drive a Porsche for a day, just to feel the feeling of "American Success".

Mr. Dell felt that even the portrayal of jobs that lead to American success were unrealistic for African-American men because of the lack of available opportunities. He says,

The likelihood of a young urban man coming from the ghetto, and ending up an investment banker is slim to none. And because the media regards such an occupation as one of the ultimate occupations, simply because of the wide possibility of a seven-digit

income, this urban man may feel discouraged and depressed.

Mr. Dell feels that the media presentation of symbols of success downplays the jobs, to which African-American men in large part do have access. In this regard Mr. Dell states,

The media honors doctors, lawyers, investment bankers, computer techs and sports figures---all of which are long shots for our urban youth, thus creating a feeling of hopelessness among our urban ghettos. If the media honored teachers, coaches, firemen and military men, African-American men would feel that success would be more within reach.

Participants felt that television mass media and print journalism in terms of the concept of success and voice was a threat to the mental healthy well being of African-American men, giving voice only to those African-American men that the media selected to attribute high profile status. Mr. Peirson states,

I think that mass media and print journalism has eliminated the voice of successful African-American men since the untimely assassination of Dr. King. There have been a few people that have emerged. There was Jesse, Andrew Young, I suppose to a certain

extent, Minister Sharpton and Farrakhan. But before, prior, there was significant Black media, all the communities had Black media and we had our own little information network that no one paid attention to. I would suggest that the media puts names out there, but the effect is negative. They try to make Al Sharpton almost a caricature. They magnified poor Jesse and his child out of wedlock and so on. So mass media has essentially eliminated a national voice for African-Americans. Our biggest spokesmen now are athletes and rappers and they're not agents of social change.

Some of the participants felt that for the successful African-American man who wants to maintain a strong sense of ethnic identity, he has no voice in the mainstream media. Mr. Dell states,

If an African-American man in this country wants his voice to be heard, he must first assimilate into the Anglo American culture, shape his views to theirs and then speak, *if* given the chance. Conversely, if his views are not of the dominant force, he will not be given the chance to speak at all.

Mr. Dell feels that when this happens, the only other outlet is the African-American media. He says,

If he (the African-American man) is not given the chance using conventional American media outlets, he must rely on the African-American media outlets such as the national television station BET (Black Entertainment Television) and national publications such as Ebony, Black Enterprise and Jet.

Participants were asked about their experiences of using their voice as a successful African-American man. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rutledge both had experiences where their voices were not heard and accepted because they were African-American men. Mr. Rutledge states,

...every time I make an error or I'm wrong on something, they'll say "you know, you just dumb, that's it." And I say, "Well, at least I can recognize it." "But, don't ever think that I'm that dumb that I won't one day sit on you," and I've had to do it.

In Mr. Johnson's experience, his voice as a successful African-American man was challenged somewhat differently. Mr. Johnson related,

I've been in situations where I could say something and it's not acknowledged and some white person can come along and say the same thing and then it gets acknowledged. I can recall even sometimes where a



white person will make known that I said that previously...but I'll get a challenge because I'm African-American saying it; and then if somebody white says it, it gets agreed upon.

Mr. Peirson and Mr. Dell related experiences, in contrast to that of Mr. Johnson, where their voices were heard, and accepted solely because they were successful African-American men. Mr. Peirson shares his experience being an acknowledged "token". He states,

I served on a number of boards and realized that I'm a token. I give them that splash of color, but I've also found that, not immediately, but after, they discover that I'm actually competent. My ethnic status gets me in positions and then may open some doors, and from there I'm able to advocate, and I've done some good things in those positions.

Whereas Mr. Peirson felt he was a token when his voice and views were invited, Mr. Dell felt that he was invited because of his experiences and the perspective he brought to the table. He states,

Many times I am asked to speak on panels because I am viewed as a "successful" African-American man. I'm asked to share my views, my values and my efforts in this interesting journey I've taken. I am able to

provide an African-American perspective and another angle. My voice was accepted because I was invited to speak, invited to share my experiences.

It is to be noted that Mr. Dell did say that there were times during the course of his thirty years working with the federal government that he felt his voice was not acknowledged solely on the basis of his being African-American.

From the participants' responses to research question #1, three strands emerge. First, the voices of successful African-American men become stifled when society and mass media send one message in terms of success, access, and opportunity while the realities of being a successful African-American man in a Eurocentric setting sends a conflicting message. The one message says that as a successful African-American man you can have voice if you have access and opportunity. The conflicting message is that you will have access and opportunity to the degree you are willing to forgo your ethnic identity and assimilate.

Secondly, successful African-American men with Afrocentric perspectives are being asked to fit into Eurocentric molds striving for Eurocentric models. When compared to the dominant European culture, the numbers of the minority culture of Successful African-American men is

so small that their voices will not be heard; their voices will be stifled.

*Research Question #2: How does a successful African-American man sustain his manhood in a racist society?*

There were four questions that guided the dialogue to answer research question #2. The three themes that emerged which were useful in helping successful African-American men sustain their manhood in a racist society were (a) validation from family and the African-American community, (b) functioning in a supportive and nurturing environment, and (c) growing up in the South. One participant did mention that he used aggression. Mr. Peirson stated,

I get aggressive. At one time, I was amongst my mentors who suggested the old, "Turn the other cheek" strategy and just go on, and that didn't work for me, because it seemed to me to inspire more bigotry and more bigoted attacks and also, it was a bit inconsistent with my nature. So I began to respond aggressively, and it took a couple of years, and I got in a number of people's faces and did a bunch of stuff, and miraculously I have not, since that time, dealt with any of that stuff directly.

Each of the participants, including Mr. Peirson mentioned the importance and power of having validation from the African-American community to help African-American men sustain their manhood in a racist society. Having validation from the white community was not a priority. Mr. Johnson said,

I don't need to be validated by the dominant society. I need to be validated, if at all, by African-Americans. I would prefer to have that. If you're just trying to go along and have your own sense of identity, purpose, and direction, then you identify strongly as an African in a Diaspora. I think you look for your validation from Africans.

Mr. Peirson felt that when a successful African-American man lives and works in a community that is predominantly white, there is a need for validation from both the African-American and the white communities. He states,

I would say to an extent it is proportional. They need to be validated by the larger society to the extent...inversely proportional to the extent that they receive validation from their own community, in their own social circles. In other words, if you're getting your validation in your church or on your

basketball team or in your immediate community, that can be fulfilling. Here in \_\_\_\_\_ where there is not a significant, large enough (Black) community perhaps, to provide that (validation) on a consistent basis, the need to get external validation is proportional. So what you find, amongst a number of more active African-American males in this community is they seek approval from the white establishment.

Mr. Dell feels that all African-American men need validation from the dominant society no matter where they live and work. He also feels that the African-American men would never admit this need. He states,

African-American men would never admit they need validation from the dominant society. However, I believe subconsciously we do seek some sort of validation so that we can free ourselves of the mental slavery that the oppressor has, over time, killed our youth's spirit with. It's like being trapped, mentally, but not knowing you have shackles on until you try to run. Liberation from such mental trappings would be enough validation, because then African-American men would feel equal and that is what is needed, not validation, Equality, not validation.

Growing up in the segregated South with a nurturing family that taught him how to negotiate racist situations has been a strong factor for Mr. Johnson. He felt that coming from a culture of racism and segregation in the South prepared him well, for his life in the North. He states,

I grew up in an environment where it was part of the culture that enabled you to deal with racism because it was segregated. And that gave me a kind of mental toughness and a view of the world that was different, and I didn't have the illusion of the way the world should be. I dealt with the world as it was, and I think with that reality is that racism was just...it was the way things were. I grew up in it and my mother had prepared me for it, too.

They taught lessons in the sense, they wouldn't call it lessons, but there was teaching about the way white people treat us and that kind of thing. The way the cops come into communities and beat heads, and by and large they were white cops doing that. So, seeing the contradictions and having to adjust to that, knowing that if you crossed a certain line there was consequences, and in some cases, the consequences was death if you were at certain places where you

shouldn't be or you went to the wrong fountain something would happen. If you looked at a white woman a certain way, something would happen.

So all those early teachings prepared me and gave me the mental toughness to deal with it, so when I went off to schools that were integrated, it was fairly easy for me. The stuff they were doing in that environment wasn't dramatic. It was like a plaything because I had gone through the heavy stuff. I was trained by the best, I mean, when you been trained by the southern white man as to how to deal, when you learn in that environment, this is a cakewalk around here, You know?

For Mr. Dell, it is education and the richness of his culture that sustain him. He says,

It is possible to sustain one's manhood if armed with a hearty education, a solid profession and an understanding of his culture, history, and his place in the country. Confronting the evils of the African-American people's history, gives one the necessary drive to earn the respect that is long overdue.

Adversity builds strength and the more one knows about the historical atrocities that were endured by his people, the more he will fight to prove himself today.

He is able to sustain his manhood in this racist society with a strong family, an intelligent mind, and strength to know no matter what racism comes his way, he can overcome it.

*Research Question #3: What societal stabilizers serve as buffers to the African-American male's emotional psyche?*

Participants mentioned various buffers that they used to protect themselves emotionally from the mundane, extreme, environmental stress (MEES) in their daily lives. They used sports (watching them and playing them), and listening and playing music. Mr. Moncrief mentioned that he often times plays his piano for hours at a time. The Church and spirituality were important for both Mr. Johnson and Mr. Dell although both said that they do not attend any church regularly. While Mr. Johnson professes his spirituality strongly, he clearly sees a separation between spirituality and the Church. Mr. Johnson commented,

I grew up in the church...We had to go to church until we became teenagers and then our mother allowed us to make a choice. I opted out. And I stayed away from the church until I had children and I went back to church for my kids, and when they became teenagers they had the option I had to opt out, and they opted out. But in terms of a more spiritual kind of up



bringing, I had that. My mother always saw church as a kind of a rip off. She resented the fact that ministers made the money, and had the pick of the litter, and had all the fried chicken, and the poor people went there and was preyed upon...And my mother never bought into that, and I was influenced by that, but she was a very spiritual person...I see so many contradictions in the church...I have a direct pipeline to God. I don't need an intermediary.

Mr. Dell feels that spirituality is important in his life and is the source of his strength. He said,

I rely on my spiritual connection with God to move me through any hurt, heartache and pain that I've been forced to endure. The power of His presence in my life has enabled me to get through difficult times using prayer. I pray for strength to get through any obstacles in my life and I thank Him each day to let him know I couldn't have survived without Him in my life. I believe adversity builds strength and I believe that we all go through hard times so that we come out of them stronger people. Adversity builds a strong heart and because the heart is the foundation of our physical being, and God, the foundation of our spiritual being, we are tested, only to build and

rebuild both elements of ourselves. The more we go through, the stronger we become. Without God in one's life and without a strong will, we will surrender easier, be weakened and have a tough time with the next emotional, physical or mental battle we encounter.

In addition to spirituality, other societal stabilizers that serve as buffers to the successful African-American male's emotional psyche were participation in civic organizations such as the Urban League, the American Red Cross, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). For Mr. Peirson, the Black Panther Party served as a buffer for him in his early years. He recalls,

...59<sup>th</sup> and Grove was my first address that I remember and that was a block away from the old Merritt College where Huey Newton and Bobby Seals, my father's God-child, David Hilliard attended school. In terms of my ideology and my approach to things it was undoubtedly the Black Panther Party that was the biggest influence for me.

Two other powerful buffers for the participants seem to have been strong male friendships and finding a place of

respite. Three participants recalled at least one male who mentored, modeled, coached or helped him in some memorable way.

I must credit a good friend of mine for being responsible for the first job lead that lead me to my career with the federal government. Many of my friendships have contributed to both my success in my career and in my happiness. I value them as I value family (Mr. Dell).

Mr. Rutledge recalled, "The only reason I took on the job of church usher was because I was helping out a good friend of mine."

I recall there were two men who were paramount in my life. One was the director of the Brother Street YMCA. The other was on the Georgia Statewide Board of Trustees. Just phenomenal men. They were directly responsible for me going to college. Had it not been for those two men, I'd probably be dead now. So they've just been super. And the thing that impressed me most about them, when I went off to college, I didn't have any money. They helped me get into college. They sent me money while I was there. When I finished and started working, I wanted to pay them back; they refused to take any money back. They said,

"Do somebody else like we did you." And so I spent my life trying to pay them back by doing for others what they did for me.

For Mr. Moncrief and Mr. Johnson, finding inner peace as a respite from the everyday racism served as a buffer for them. Mr. Moncrief said,

Those things (racism, prejudice, and bigotry) are no longer a determinant in my emotional attitude because eventually one will have to grow beyond them or succumb to them. If we realize that justice is always a work-in-progress and that we have many allies then the festering sores of media-hyped madness, which takes efforts at equality out of context, assumes its rightful place, in the trashcan of abused personalities.

Mr. Johnson commented,

I can't think of a place now that I go that I don't feel peace. I lost my mother, be four years in August and that catapulted me to another level in terms of what was important. Last August I thought I had prostate cancer. September I was recovering from a biopsy that was a false positive. All of that has facilitated peace...I learned how to be peaceful in spite of racism years ago.

All of the participants in their own way found the societal stabilizers that served as the best buffers against racism for them. These included spirituality, strong friendships, community groups, and civic organizations.

*Research Question # 4: What are the sources of validation (of self-worth) for the African-American male?*

For each of the participants, the central place from which they found validation was within the structure of the family. It was from the focal point of the family that confirmation of self was most evidenced. Other places of validation were from friends and community. Mr. Dell said, "I am validated by my 45-year marriage. I am validated by the love I have for and from my three children."

Mr. Johnson spoke of who he felt it was important for him to be validated by. Mentioning specifically the women who raised him he says, "...based upon how my grandmother sees me, how my aunt sees me, how my mother sees me, how the family sees me, how people in the community see me in terms of having respect..."

I was surprised that participants did not mention satisfactory job performance as a source of validation. They did mention pride and satisfaction in their job but they did not include their job as a source of validation.

The emphasis for validation was on family, close friends, and the community.

### Summary Of The Findings

The purpose of this study was to listen to the voices of successful African-American men as they talked about the life situations, people, events and communities of support that had created their success and sustained them. The aim of the researcher, in dialoguing with this population, was 1.) to add to the body of research that identifies resiliency factors in successful African-American men. 2.) to add to a body of research that identifies common experiences for successful African-American men. 3.) to identify those factors which help successful African-American men sustain a sense of dignity, balance, and humanity when dealing with what Carroll (1988) refers to as mundane, extreme, environmental stress factor (M.E.E.S.).

As the researcher dialogued with the participants, they were often times not far from the precipice of being able to maintain emotionally in many different areas. The life experiences they shared brought back strong feelings of struggle, pain, and opportunity denied. There were three main themes that appeared to be a common thread that connected and interwove itself in all of the dialogues.

These three themes were resiliency factors, common experiences and support systems. The core foundation of strength for each of the participants was family, both immediate and extended. Much support came from extended family where a participant may have been adopted as a godchild, nephew, or son in a situation where there was no actual bloodline connection. In each situation, the idea of family permeated resiliency factors, common experiences, and support systems.

In terms of the support systems, there was family, community, and spirituality. The spirituality did not always consist of attending a church or mosque every week but the idea of a personal relationship with a God who was in charge of their life. This fact appeared to be a comfort and sustaining factor for participants in times when they were at peace with life situations as well as when they were experiencing difficulties.

In addition to the common experiences that qualified each participant as a 1997 Portrait of Success recipient for the African-American Community Entrustment, each participant had children and each shared experiences that brought back powerful emotions.

Sources of validation for the participants were family, and knowing that they had given back to their

community. Cultural pride was also a source of validation and resiliency for each participant. There was a pride in having been identified as successful and at the same time maintaining their Black, African-American identity. There was cultural pride in having been identified as achieving success in the Eurocentric society and the African-American society while maintaining their Black identity.

Four of the five participants mentioned during the second dialogue that they might not be the right person to be interviewed for the study because they felt they did not fit society's mold of the African-American man. They expounded on the stereotype of the African-American man and how they did not match that stereotype. It occurred to the researcher that although these men had been identified as successful, they had been entrapped in the idea of the stereotype of what the African-American man is supposed to be and somehow felt uncomfortable being part of a study on successful African-American men. It was almost as if they felt unworthy of being part of serious research. This might be a research study in itself to find out the depth to which successful African-American men have been so affected by outside negative images of themselves that even when they are shown to be successful, they find the label difficult to accept.



Another area for further research from this study might be the effects of same race discrimination. One of the participants in the study became what is known as in statistics as the outlier. He felt that the stifling of his voice and most of the acts of discrimination against him had come from his own people. Throughout the dialogues, his reference point usually came back to discrimination and acts of prejudice he had experienced from other African-Americans. He had very fair complexion and could pass for white. He stated in his interview that he could have passed for white where he was brought up.

The findings of the study collaborate with the literature review. Concepts of cultural pride, family, community, spirituality, and strong support systems, lending themselves to giving voice to successful African-American men, have their roots in ancient Africa and have not changed. It was Marcus Garvey (1923) who said, "I stand before you as a proud Black man, honoured to be a Black man, who would be nothing else in God's creation but a Black man." It was Marian Wright Edelman (1994) who said, "It is utterly exhausting being Black in America --- Physically, mentally, and emotionally.... There is no respite or escape from your badge of color." Both these quotes could equally be the mantra for each of the

successful African-American men who participated in this research study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion, Recommendations, Reflections

#### Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to listen to the voices of successful African-American men as they talked about the life situations, people, events and communities of support that had created their success and sustained them. The aim of the researcher, in dialoguing with this population, was 1.) to add to the body of research that identifies resiliency factors in successful African-American men. 2.) to add to a body of research that identifies common experiences for successful African-American men. 3.) to identify the sources of validation which help successful African-American men sustain a sense of dignity, balance, and humanity when dealing with the stress of everyday racism.

The review of the literature showed that the elements of family and community, which were important, sustaining factors for the African-American man in Africa before American slavery, continue to be sustaining factors in his life today. Findings from the research indicate that family, community and friendship bonds are the sources of

validation for the successful African-American man and that these factors are also what nourish his resiliency.

The common experiences for the successful African-American men were the generative themes, which emerged from the dialogues. These themes were: 1.) a sense of spirituality, 2.) strong, sustaining family relations, 3.) the importance of education, 4.) pride in being African-American, and 5.) pride in holding on to their Black identity.

Through dialogical interchange as a methodology, participants were empowered through their own voice being used as research. They were able to reflect upon those parts of their lives that had transformed them and relive those transformations through dialogue in a way that could transform their future. Participants were eager to add to the body of knowledge on successful African-American men. They wanted to continue to talk and share their lives.

Findings of the study were significant because the life experiences of the participants add to the body of research literature in the area of successful African-American men. The findings were also significant because the dialogues served as a powerful medium to generate themes related to voice and validation for African-American men.

### Recommendations For Further Research

The study of the voices of successful African-American men needs to be expanded to include a larger number of participants. The geographical area that the participants are pooled from also needs to be more inclusive of the African-American Diaspora. Areas for further research and investigation could include exploring the themes of freedom jeopardized, tolerance of ignorance, history of pain, having faith to succeed, overcoming barriers, and internal and external struggles to survive. A correlation study might be done on the children of successful African-American men to see if the same or similar factors of resiliency exist.

### Recommendations for Practice

One practical recommendation for this study would be to use it to persuade print journalism and television media executives to include more culturally realistic models of African-American men in their productions. The power of the media cannot be underestimated in its impact on societal norms and customs.

Another recommendation would be to have a symposium with all of the participants, first meeting together to draw strength from the collective wisdom and then meeting

periodically as a group in dialogue with young African-American men.

### Reflections

I enjoyed my research and it has changed me. I gained a new perspective on life from dialoguing with the participants. They had so much to offer because of the journeys they had traveled. Each of them had been on somewhat of a lonely journey, as they mentioned how they did not have many African-American peers who were in the same space as they were. It was not that they were lonesome. By the second dialogue, I felt like a therapist because of the information the participants were sharing with me and because they wanted to continue sharing. More than once, I received a contact after a dialogue because a participant wanted to add more information or send me information. Two of the participants mentioned at one point that they might not be the best person to interview because they did not fit the mold of what an African-American man should be. At this point I realized how they were also caught in the brainwashed thinking of what mass media and print journalism say an African-American man should be and do and have and aspire to. I wish there were some way to have a symposium with all of the research participants.

They each had so much that they could give to each other. Each of them had an amazing inner strength that came through even when that strength was coming through tears or a cracking voice. My wish for each of the participants is that God will always cradle them with love that will sustain them and peace that will keep them.

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## APPENDIXES

## Appendix A

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

**CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT**

1. You are being asked to participate in a research study.

**2. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

Mrs. Lois M. Moore, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is conducting a study on the oppressed voices of successful African-American men. The researcher is interested in documenting the voices of successful African-American men as they address issues of sustaining their manhood in a racist society, constructing buffers for emotional stability and creating sources of validation within their communities. The research from this study will serve as a framework with which young, African-American boys can work towards self-actualization and success.

I am being asked to participate in this research study because I am an African-American man and in 1997, was identified as one of the 50 Bay Area Portraits of Success by the African-American Community Entrustment.

**3. Procedures**

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will participate in an initial interview with the researcher where I will be asked general questions about my background and experiences as an African-American man.
2. I will be given a transcript of the initial interview to read and comment on.

3. I will participate in a second interview with the researcher and asked follow-up questions from the first interview and additional questions about my experiences as a successful African-American man.
4. I will be given a text of the generative themes that emerge from the two interviews.
5. I will be asked to comment on the generative themes that emerge from the interviews.

The interviews will occur in a mutually agreed upon location.

#### **4. Risks and/or Discomforts**

1. It is possible that some of the questions may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.
2. Reliving hurtful or oppressive situations may cause discomfort and distress.
3. Revealing very personal and intimate information to a researcher may cause me discomfort.
4. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records and tapes will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be kept in locked files at all times. Only the researcher will have access to the files.
5. Because the time required for my participation may be up to 2 hours, I may become tired.

#### **5. Benefits**

1. Participants will gain personal self-awareness and empowerment knowing that they were co-researchers on a body of knowledge that will be available for others to read, ponder, and learn from.
2. Participants will gain the prestige of having their words from the dialogues in print.

#### **6. Costs/Financial Considerations**

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

## **7. Payment/Reimbursement**

I will not be paid for my participation in this research study.

## **8. Questions**

I have talked to Mrs. Moore about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at home or e-mail her at merriweather02@hotmail.com. I may also contact Dr. Patricia Mitchell at the University of San Francisco School of Education (415) 422-6525.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with Mrs. Moore. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94111-1080.

## **9. Consent**

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

**PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.** I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student or employee at the University of San Francisco.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

---

Participant's Signature

Date of Signature

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date of Signature

## Appendix B

Name Inclusion in Dissertation Text

I wish to have my legal name included in the text of the dissertation. This means that I give my approval to have direct quotes or summaries of my words acknowledged with my legal name. My signature below indicates my approval.

---

Printed legal name to be used

---

---

Participant's signature  
Date of signature

As a participant in the study, I elect to use a pseudonym to protect my privacy and identity. For all quotes attributed to me and summaries of my words, the following pseudonym, chosen by me, will be used throughout the text of the dissertation.

---

Printed Pseudonym

---

---

Signature of Participant  
Date of Signature

---

---

Signature of Researcher  
Date of Signature



## Appendix C

## Release Form for Audio Tapes and Transcripts

I agree to have my dialogues with Lois Moore audio taped and transcribed into written form. I realize that it is the responsibility of both Lois Moore and me to ensure the accuracy of these transcriptions.

I am also aware that the original audiotapes and transcripts will be kept in a safe place in Mrs. Moore's home for a period of three years, after which they will be destroyed. The transcribed copies I receive will be destroyed or not, at my discretion.

---

Participant's Signature  
Date of Signature

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent  
Date of Signature

## Appendix D

**QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE DIALOGUE**

1. As an African-American man, how do you define success?
2. By what barometer would you measure success?
3. To what extent does mass media affect the concept of success for African-American men?
4. To what extent does mass media affect the voice of successful African-American men?
5. Do you remember any experiences when you felt that your voice was heard and accepted solely because you were African-American?
6. Do you remember any experiences when you felt that your voice was either not heard or not acknowledged solely because you were African-American?
7. What societal stabilizers serve as buffers to the African-American male's emotional psyche?
8. What role have civic and religious organizations played in your success?
9. What role have civic and religious organizations played in your success?
10. What are the sources of validation (of self-worth for you as an African-American man?
11. What keeps you balanced, in a social comfort zone when confronted with racism, prejudice, and bigotry?
12. Do you remember any experiences that were uncomfortable because they were overshadowed by race?
13. What strategies have you used to counter personal racist hurts?
14. Where do you find respite?

15. As you look back, who are the people that you are glad were in your life?
16. What advice and words of wisdom would you give to young African-American men as they lay a foundation for their lives?

## Appendix E

## TELEPHONE TRANSCRIPT

TRANSCRIPT FOR VERBAL CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
--

1. Hello, my name is Lois Moore and I am a doctoral student working with Dr. Patricia Mitchell, a professor at the University of San Francisco. I am doing a study on the oppressed voices of successful African-American men. I am interested in finding the themes present in the voices of Black men so as to create a framework for success for educators working with young African-American boys.
2. I would like to invite you to be a participant in this research because you are an African-American man and in 1997 was identified by the African-American Community Entrustment and the Bay Area United Way as a "Portrait of Success." If you agree to participate in this study, I will conduct two dialogue interviews with you.
3. Some of the questions that guide the dialogue may make you feel uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any questions or stop participation at any time. Although you will not be asked to use your name in the interviews, participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Transcripts will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All information will be kept in secure files at all times. Only Dr. Mitchell and I will have access to the transcripts.
4. While there will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the anticipated benefit will be a workable model for success for young, African-American males.

5. There will be no costs to you as a result of participating in the study, nor will you be reimbursed for your participation in this study.
6. If you have questions about the research, you may contact me at 415.898-2121. If you have further questions about the study, you may contact the (Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects) IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling 415.422.6091 and leaving a voicemail message.

## Appendix F

## Letter Sent With Transcripts

February 24, 2002

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Enclosed you will find your transcript from our conversation along with a copy of the Research Subjects' Bill of Rights. Please read the transcript and make any corrections in factual information you feel necessary. If there is any information you would prefer deleted, that will be done. If there are any names, you would prefer changed or deleted to protect privacy and confidentiality, that will be done.

As mentioned in my initial contact, I will need a follow-up interview. The purpose of the follow-up interview is to ask questions generated from themes in the first interview. I can interview you in person at a time and place of your convenience.

I will be in contact with you during the first week in March to arrange for the follow-up interview. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me.

Again, thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Lois M. Moore

## Appendix G

**IRBPHS APPLICATION****I. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

From the era of Reconstruction to the present, the voices of successful African-American men have been stifled in our society.

These voices need to be documented to serve as a model for young African-American men who feel they have no voices (Edwards, Polite 1992). The positive voices of successful African-American men have been stifled. There seems to be a conspiracy in America to hide the truth --- the truth that most African-American men are gainfully employed, law-abiding citizens taking care of their homes and families. Young Black men are losing their lives to depression, violence, suicide and destructive behavior as they fall victim to the lie that they are worthless (West, hooks 1991).

There can be no adequate study of African-American men without the study and consideration of his African roots and ancestry. Ancient kemet civilization, the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade, slavery, Emancipation, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, Segregation, Black Codes, Desegregation, Integration, and Backlash all serve as a backdrop and framework for the study of successful African-American men.

In addition to the historical perspective of the African-American male, we must also consider him within a framework of philosophical, sociological, and psychological factors. As I listen to the stories of successful African-American men in a framework of historical, psychological and social considerations, I will be able to document and map out some of the places for "recognizing their value" that have sustained them through the years. I will be using a Participatory Research method of inquiry.

## II. DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

The participants I will be interviewing will be five (5) African-American men who have been identified by the Bay Area United Way and the African-American Community Entrustment as five (5) of the fifty (50) *Portraits of Success* in the San Francisco Bay Area for 1997. These men are professionals in the age range of 40 - 75 years of age. All six of them have a direct personal involvement with youth and the elderly either through their job or community involvement. They have demonstrated leadership, creative vision and initiative in interacting with the African-American community over a period of twenty-five years or more. They have all received local, regional and national awards and recognition for their service to the African-American Community.

I will gain contact to these men through personal telephone contact. Since the African-American Community Entrustment identified them at a public recognition dinner, their names and places of employment were included in a souvenir book. I will contact them through their place of



employment. Where this is not possible, I will contact the Entrustment to help me contact the men.

I have a relationship with these men because I was also in the selected group of the Fifty Portrait of Success Awardees. Some of them I know because we live in the same county.

### **III. RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE**

I will be calling each potential applicant on the telephone to ask him to participate in the research. After making telephone contact, if the participant agrees to participate, I will send him a consent letter to read, sign, and return to me.

Although a database of information exists on my subjects through the African-American Community Entrustment, I will not have access to the information.

### **IV. SUBJECT CONSENT PROCESS**

After receiving telephone consent from a participant, I will mail him an Informed Consent Form to read, sign, and return to me (Appendix A).

### **V. PROCEDURES**

- B.** Participants will be contacted by phone for consent.
- C.** Participants will be sent a letter of consent to sign (Appendix A), along with a copy of questions to guide the dialogue. (Appendix C)
- D.** A face-to-face interview will be arranged at the participant's place of employment or another agreed

upon public place. The interview will be taped and transcribed (Appendix B)

- E.** Participant will be sent a script of the first dialogue.
- F.** A second face to face dialogue interview will be conducted
- G.** Participant will be sent a summary of the generative themes from both interviews.

## **VI. POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS**

There may be some emotional discomfort as participants share and relive experiences of oppression and events from their pasts where they did not have control.

## **VII. MINIMIZATION OF POTENTIAL RISK**

I will be constantly reminding them that they may have the tape recorder turned off and the interview stopped at any time they wish. They are also free to choose not to answer questions that make them feel uncomfortable and they may stop the interview at any time. I will also tell them of the confidentiality of their identity and information they share. I will emphasize to them that they are co-researchers with me, creating a living document that will validate their pain and oppression.

## **VIII. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS**

" When we put the words of our dialogue into a text, they gain the prestige of literacy which will be very meaningful for the many people who have never had their

words written. The energy and interest of the participants and researchers in reading their own words are extremely powerful "(Ada & Beutel, 1993).

Participants will gain personal self-awareness and empowerment knowing that they were co-researchers on a body of knowledge that will be available for others to read, ponder, and learn from.

#### **IX. COSTS TO PARTICIPANTS**

The costs to participants will be in the value of their time. Each interview will take 1 1/2 to 2 hours. There will also be additional time required of participants in reading their transcripts and the generative themes.

#### **X. REIMBURSEMENTS/COMPENSATION TO PARTICIPANTS**

There will be no monetary reimbursement or compensation to participants. I do plan to send a thank you letter.

#### **XI. CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS**

Data will not be anonymous but confidentiality will be respected. I will be the only person with information on and access to the identity of each participant. Tapes and transcripts will be kept in a secure location and no one will have access to it except me.

## Appendix H

**Portrait of Success Award Qualifications**

African-American civic leaders who unstintingly  
work for their communities by:

- 1.continuing the financial giving legacy
- 2.Having a direct personal involvement with  
our youth and elderly
- 3.Contributing a distinct perspective of  
achievement and creativity
- 4.Generating a spirit of hope and prosperity
- 5.Demonstrating leadership, creative vision  
and initiative

They must possess:

- 1.Extraordinary talents that have  
distinguished them in their lives
- 2.Qualities of character that have given them  
staying power over many years through great  
challenges

These men were honored for their professional  
achievements over a period

of at least 25 years and for their services to the  
Black community both

locally, regionally and nationally.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

Wisdom Of The Oppressed: Stirring The Voices Of Successful African-American Men

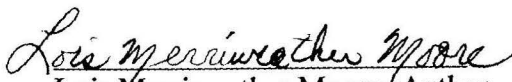
Studies and experiences of dysfunctional African-American men can be readily found in literature reviews while research on the resiliency and common experiences of achievement factors for successful African-American men seems to have a void. The dominant media portrayal of African-American men would have one believe that African-American men's lives are prone to violence and limited to sports, music, and the legal system. This is a dangerous and debilitating stereotype because there is no balance that tells the truth, that the vast majority of African-American men are gainfully employed, law-abiding citizens taking care of their homes and families. They are nonviolent, contributing members of society. Young African-American men are losing their lives to depression, violence, suicide and destructive behavior as they fall victim to the stereotype that they are worthless. The images African-American men see every day do not portray them in a positive light; nor do those images portray them in the light of truth. The voices of successful African-American men appear to have been silenced.

In a participatory research approach, the researcher engages five successful African-American men in dialogue to explore their reflections on those factors that have contributed to their present success. Through a process of dialogic retrospection, they

reflect on people who have influenced their lives, racism they have encountered, and prejudice they have lived through. The dialogue centers around four generative questions.

1. To what extent are the voices of successful African-American men silenced?
2. How does an African-American man sustain his sense of self-worth in a racist society?
3. What societal stabilizers serve as buffers to the African-American male's emotional psyche?
4. What are the sources of validation for the African-American male?

Findings of the research indicated that today's successful African-American men use the same resiliency factors and communities of support to sustain them as did their African ancestors. Family, community, and a sense of giving back are among the factors that play a major role in giving voice to successful African-American men.

  
Lois Merriweather Moore, Author

  
Dr. Patricia Mitchell  
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee